

THE DRACULA HORROR SERIES #3

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Dracula's Brothers

Killer vampire bats are terrorizing the nation. Only Dracula, the greatest vampire of them all, can control them. Will he?

by Robert Lory



Dracula's Brothers
Robert Lory

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Wolves he rules, great cats, all others
But of the blood bats, he speaks as brothers.

The Runes of Ktara

Chapter One

Such little problems loom large in the minds of men, especially when the shroud of night drives away the relative cheer of the light of day. How important even petty worries become, worries which would be recognized as inconsequential if only the individuals doing the worrying realized that, in reality, there were far greater problems which at any moment might visit them with the suddenness of swift wings.

Swift, beating wings—like those of death.

The New York City night was cooler than normal, bringing with it the hint of the winter which in a matter of weeks would descend into the concrete canyons of Manhattan. Cold and clear, the weatherman had said on the six o'clock news, and at nine, as Zheliazko Stoykichev hurried through the lobby of the United Nations General Assembly Building, he agreed that for once the weather predictors might be right. Stoykichev, a lean, balding man of thirty-one years, looked unimpressive as he passed quickly under the great statue of Zeus and, indeed, looked unimpressive in comparison with most human figures, whether of stone or of flesh. The little diplomatic assistant from the People's Republic of Bulgaria had attained the highest position he could look forward to and he knew it. He had, in fact, resigned himself to his station in life some years ago. He had not been a brilliant student, had not shown much evidence of being skilled in any particular trade or craft. He owed his present position to his father's influence. It had been embarrassing to him when he accidentally overheard his thundering forebear insist to a co-worker, 'I think that you must accept the fact Zheliazko is suited for the diplomatic life. After all, he has not the spine to disagree with a mildly displeased pussycat.'

Stoykichev and his father both would have been surprised if they could have foreseen that, during his posting to the United Nations, the amount-to-nothing son was going to be personally involved in one of the most bizarre series of events ever to have taken place at that place of august assemblage. If either father or son could have foreseen such a thing, both would have inferred that any sudden prominence of Zheliazko Stoykichev could result only from his bungling something important. They would have been wrong.

The simple fact was that he was going to die.

This very night, some fifteen minutes after he passed under the strangely wild eyes of the chief Greek god, Zheliazko Stoykichev was going to die horribly. He would not be the last to die this night. A singular honor, he was to be the first.

At the present moment, however, as he crossed the distance between the General Assembly Building to the towering Secretariat Building, his thoughts were far from any kind of honor that might be due him. Quite the opposite. Unfortunately, he had bungled things again.

Nothing very serious, except that the Second Secretary had acted as if the

world were coming to an end—a process that assuredly was going to start in the capital city of Sophia and spread outward in concentric circles to envelop civilization itself—unless the manila folder which Stoykichev had left on the conference room table was retrieved at once and brought to the Second Secretary who, having the folder safely in hand again, could then, and only then, breathe easier.

What the folder contained the little assistant had no idea, but he knew that it couldn't have been very earth-shattering or even slightly important. Otherwise he, Stoykichev, would not have been entrusted with handling it at all, not even carrying it from one place to another. No, he knew the ploy for what it was. Pure and simple, he had been the victim of the Second Secretary's desire to demonstrate his authority—also of the Second Secretary's desire for the very curvy Frenchwoman to whom he was demonstrating that authority. Stoykichev's usual problem with attending any kind of party was that of being the lowest ranking person in attendance. After getting chewed out for some inconsequential thing, he would skulk away, pretending not to hear the person who had reprimanded him then confidentially tell a bystander, 'Pity, a real pity. You simply will not believe it when I tell you who his father is.'

Someday, Stoykichev told himself as he stepped into the Secretariat elevator ... someday this humiliation will be over.

He was exactly thirteen minutes away from the end of his humiliation—and of everything else.

High up in the great glass pinnacle, the elevator door opened and Stoykichev stepped out into the hall. Immediately he realized that he'd gotten out of the car at, the wrong floor. He must have pushed the wrong button. But now the door had silently closed behind him, and there was nothing for him to do but to press the button that would resummon that or another vehicle to convey him to his correct destination. He waited a little less than two minutes—just about one-sixth of his remaining life span.

He had nine minutes left when he found the right floor and stood before the conference door. The door was locked. Of course it would be locked. He should have known—*did* know—that! He swore under his breath. The Second Secretary no doubt knew it as well. Zheliazko Stoykichev had once more played the fool! Unless—

As he turned to head back to the elevator, he nearly crashed into an enormous black woman, who brandished a mop and pail much as those terribly disgusting women brandished pitchfork and bale in those old Soviet paintings which purported to show The Worker Blissfully at Work. Stoykichev stepped back instinctively from the real woman, just as he always had retreated from the paintings. He was about to mumble some American apology or other, when he saw the woman pause before the conference room. She fiddled with a ring of keys.

'Are you planning to clean up that room?' he asked.

She stared at him blankly. 'No, sir. I just thought I'd mosey on in there and, real official-like, declare World War Three.'

He laughed nervously. 'You have a way with humor,' he said.

'Don't forget rhythm, mister. But, speaking of *way*, you're in mine.'

'Oh. Sorry.' Noting that she was waiting for him not only to back off as he'd done, but also to disappear into oblivion, he added, 'I was trying to get into that room myself just now.'

The black woman nodded. 'That's just fine. You get yourself a key just like I got, and it's real easy.'

'But you've got your key,' he said.

'My key is my key. You get yours from one of the security people, okay?'

He laughed, again. 'You think I'm a spy?'

'Me, I don't think nothing. I just clean out ashtrays and mop floors. But I do that by myself, with no help and no company. That's a rule around here.'

'And if ... if ... you should find a folder with some papers in it on the table in there, what do you do with it? What do the rules say about that?'

'They say I give folder and papers to Security, that's what. And if they's there, that's where they'll go. You saying different?'

He did not like the way she tightened her grip on the mop handle.

'No, not at all. I'll simply follow you to Security and get the folder from them. Is that all right with you?'

'Fine,' she said, unlocking the door. Stepping inside the already lighted room—how these Americans waste electricity! the Bulgarian thought to himself; almost the entire building was completely lighted at night and for what? Aesthetics—she turned to him. 'Like I say, it's fine. Except there ain't no folder nowhere.'

'No folder?'

'Look for yourself. I guess you can't spy on anything that ain't there.'

Stoykichev rushed into the room. The woman was right. Except for a number of ashtrays filled with cigarette and cigar discards, the table was bare. Stoykichev the fool! Obviously the Second Secretary had—

A silent curse was the thought in the Bulgarian's mind at the moment when he had exactly five minutes to live.

'Pretty, isn't it?'

'I... I beg your pardon?'

The black woman was standing by the great plate glass window fronting on the East River. There are five thousand four hundred windows in the building, Stoykichev found himself thinking. He was good at statistics like that. Once heard, they were never forgotten.

'That's Belmont Island off to your right there,' the woman said. 'And if you look hard up to your left, you'll see—well, I'll be!'

'Something wrong?'

'Up there against the moon. A whole big flock of birds going south.'

'Birds migrate south, I'm told,' he said.

‘Yeah, they sure do, but a lot earlier in the year. They ... they look like they’re coming right this way!’

Stoykichev had moved to beside the woman.

‘You are right, they are coming this way. Flying rather low, as well. And something else. I do not think they are birds.’

The woman’s eyes grew rounder. ‘N-not birds?’

‘No. Look closely.’

The suggestion was not necessary, as the winged creatures themselves were coming closer—and fast.

‘*Bats!*’ the black woman screamed. ‘A thousand of them, looks like!’

‘Hardly a thousand,’ Stoykichev said calmly. But the bats, which he now saw were larger than those with which he was familiar, looked to number between fifty and a hundred, as, in their tight formation, they came on in their straight course toward the United Nations complex.

No, more accurately, they were homing in on this building, this ... room?

‘Good God!’ the woman screamed, her bucket going over as she raced to the door. ‘Get outa here, mister!’

The advice seemed excellent to the Bulgarian, but the flying wedge of moonlit wings was something he somehow couldn’t take his eyes from. He backed up hurriedly, his feet slipping on the soapy water which had spilled from the bucket. He caught himself on his way down by grasping the tabletop to his rear. For no more than two heartbeats were his eyes off the plate glass window separating him from the oncoming fury outside.

The splattering crash told him there was no longer a window. Not much of one, anyway.

The shrieking creatures were at him before his own scream was out of his mouth. Biting, clawing, flapping their leathery wings in his face and over his body. His stomach retched from disgust as his hands and arms whirled to beat off the attack. Then, suddenly, as a bat somewhat larger than the others came upward, slashing into his face, he knew that he was not going to win.

But he could try—had to try!

Slashing at the larger bat with the back of his hand, he connected hard, feeling disgust at the foulness of the tactile sensation, but managing to move himself around the bend of the table. Tripping, sliding, fighting, he hurled himself at the door. It was closed—and locked!

God, the woman had run from the room and locked the door behind her!

Pain shot through the back of his neck, just under his skull. A searing, ripping pain that now was matched by cutting needles in his hands and on the unprotected top of his head. With a helpless wail, he thrust his back to the door and began once more to fight.

They were all over the place.

But one in particular—that big one—seemed now to hold back as if waiting for a clear attack line. Through the wings of the others between them, Stoykichev could see the larger creature and saw that it was different in some

respects. Suddenly flashing in the room light were the two ‘thumbs’ to the front of the big bat’s wing—like silver they were! Then, as the creature saw its opening and charged with a high-pitched scream of triumph, the Bulgarian noticed an odd-shaped mark on its forehead. It was red, an almost perfect vertical ellipse—like a drop of blood!

It was the last thing Stoykichev saw before two sharp things cut into his eyeballs. He screamed with agony, bringing his hands up to his sightless sockets. Immediately, as if on signal, they were at his throat.

Harry Archer’s throat was dry. His watch told him it was ten-thirty, which meant he had another fifteen minutes before his train reached Baldwin station. Lord, four martinis—or was it five? No matter, they were enough to make a man thirsty as hell. And no bar car on this train, where that same man could get himself a thirst-quenching beer. Beer? He’d settle for a soft drink—anything.

Not only that, the damned car was too hot. Either feast or famine, Harry thought to himself. In the summertime they sweat the hell out of you. And it made no difference if you were a fifty-seven-thousand-dollar advertising account exec like Harry Archer or somebody like—well, like that clod with the lunch pail and overalls.

Harry thought about the man with the pail and overalls. He looked to be about fifty, a good ten years on Harry. Probably made—how much? These days you couldn’t tell. Lord, some of these union guys were making more money than *he* made. And that, to Harry Archer, just wasn’t fair. Harry Archer had to bust his butt for his income. Sylvia, his wife, didn’t appreciate it, either. In fact, he had no doubt that she’d take one whiff of the gin on his breath and give him the old bit about how he was enjoying himself all night in the city and letting her worry whether he was dead or worse.

Dead or worse. She always used that expression. One day he was going to ask her what it was supposed to mean. Maybe tonight. Maybe.

He again directed his attention to the older man in the overalls, the only other occupant of the car.

Harry always wondered about guys like that, what they did in the city and how come they lived this far out. Lord, just the monthly tab for commuting had to eat a big chunk out of the guy’s salary, right? Unless he was with one of those big unions. Yeah.

It was unfair, all of it. The unions get big dough, so the prices on everything go up. People complained about the salaries of admen and how what they did added plenty of bucks onto the cost of living, but they didn’t really know the score. If people who had things to sell didn’t advertise, they might not sell as much as they did. Then the whole country would go down the drain—right? Right. In which case, guys like Harry Archer were making a real positive contribution to society, but could you get the common slob in the street to understand that? No way. Harry Archer *earned* every penny of his fifty-seven thou, but what did he get for it? Late night drinking martinis with

dull clients from out of town and abuse from his wife who pretended to worry if he was dead or worse.

Unfair.

But, lord, was he thirsty. There was, of course, the water fountain up at the end of the car, but Harry had never used one of those for the seven years he'd been riding these trains. Unsanitary, they were. Besides, it wouldn't look right.

Look right to whom? There was only that other guy in the car, right?

Right.

He stood up and stepped out into the aisle. The other man did the same.

'Hot,' Harry Archer said, feeling that an explanation was needed, then feeling stupid for offering one to this nobody in overalls.

'Very,' the other man said. 'I thought I'd step out on the platform between cars. Cool off a little.'

'Good idea,' Harry said, then followed the other man up the aisle. He wondered whether he'd just committed himself to go outside as well. If he didn't go, would the older clod think he was being stuck-up—too good to associate himself with a working man? He stopped before the fountain as the other man slid back the panel door and stepped outside. Bending over to take a drink, he heard the loud clatter of steel wheels on steel rails, then heard the noise soften as the door slid shut. The guy hadn't waited!

But then, why should he? For all he knew all Harry was going to do was stop at the fountain. Besides, he had two good » hands. He could open a door for himself, couldn't he? But what he couldn't do was drink the water. There wasn't any. Maybe in one of the next cars. Sure, that was it. Perfect solution. Just go out on the platform and pass to the next car. Tell the guy that the fountain didn't work—and get a little cooler at, the same time.

It sure was a problem trying to be democratic with guys like that, Harry decided. He opened the panel and stepped onto the platform.

With the louder noise of the wheels there was another noise, a strange one, which Harry couldn't identify at first.

Not until he saw the gasping man in overalls—fighting for his breath and fighting off what looked to be a thousand flapping wings. Turning on his heel, Harry made a dash to retrace his steps. In the light from the car behind him he saw a furry creature drop down between himself and the doorway. It had the face of a hideous rat and just over the eyes there was a mark which looked like a drop of blood. Something flashed in front of his face and then Harry screamed.

Something had torn into his eyes.

He screamed a second time, but no one heard him. The other man on the platform was dead. It was only a matter of seconds before Harry joined him.

And as the train rolled eastward, the two bodies on the platform lay side by side. There was no distinction between adman and laborer. It was all very democratic.

At fifteen minutes before midnight, flashy green and pink and violet El Dorados and Mark IVs lined both sides of West Fiftieth Street between Eighth and Ninth Avenues. Their owners were, for the most part, inside the little hole in the wall on the north side of the street which the neon sign proclaimed to be *Tommy Little's*. Yancy Goldfist, as he called himself, was not inside. He was outside in the chilling night with a friend.

His multi-ringed right hand caught the friend hard and flat on her left ear.

The friend, her legs stinging from the cold under her short white satin miniskirt almost as much her face now was, whimpered her protest:

‘But Yancy—ain’t nobody hardly working tonight. The street traffic is down to zero.’

The lean black man looked at the silver-wigged black girl with pure menace.

‘Look here, Suede Mary, and tell me what you see. Look.’ He gripped her lower jaw and yanked her head toward the street.

‘I don’t see *nothing*, Yancy! Honest—nothing but the cars, that’s all.’

‘You got it, kid. The cars. Now, I got a lot of buddies inside, you know that?’

‘Sure, I know that, Yancy, but—’

It was the left hand now—fingers covered with rings like the other—that clapped into her head. ‘You just answer me when I talk, no *buts*. You got that?’

‘Sure—yes.’

‘Okay. Now, you see them cars, right?’

‘Yes.’

‘But nothing else—no other man out here with one of his girls? You don’t see even any of my other girls out here, right?’

‘No, just you and me, Yancy.’

‘That’s right. Now, if things are so bad tonight, how come it’s just you and me out here? How come there’s not a big crowd of women out here complaining to all those men inside that there’s not a buck to be made anywhere? How come it’s just you who says it’s too cold? What, to get to the point, is your problem, Suede Mary?’

The tear stains formed crystal rivers under her eyes. ‘Yancy, baby. I just don’t feel good tonight. I mean, I’m real sick. For real, baby.’

Yancy Goldfist bobbed his head up and down. ‘Can you afford to be sick tonight, girl?’

She didn’t answer. She knew what he meant, knew that he’d continue.

‘I mean, can you afford to quit right now because of not feeling too good? I *understand* you, baby, and I want to do all I can to protect you. I sure don’t want you getting real awful sick, you know? How much you got in that little purse of yours?’

‘Forty dollars, Yancy, but I can’t—’

This time she closed her mouth before he had to close it for her.

‘Better, baby, better. I don’t *like* hitting you, but sometimes I got to in order to keep you straight. I don’t like hitting any of the girls, but you *especially* I don’t like hitting. I like loving you, baby, that’s what I like.’

‘I... I like that too, Yancy.’

‘I know you do, Suede Mary. As a matter of real fact, I was thinking that maybe tonight... yeah, sure, me and you tonight. Okay, baby? You’re not too sick for that, are you?’

The girl’s eyes brightened. ‘God no, Yancy, you know I’d never be too sick for that!’

Yancy’s thumbs gently wiped her cheeks free from tears. ‘That’s my girl. I tell you what. You go back and see what you can do about meeting quota, hey? For every extra ten you bring in tonight, Yancy will give you a little something extra in return. Okay now?’

She returned his reassuring wink with an uncertain smile. ‘I’ll try, Yancy.’

‘I’m sure you will, Suede Mary.’

He watched her move east, then sighed as he started to turn to go back into Tommy Little’s. The sight of Charley Sweet in the doorway jarred him for a moment.

‘Hey, buddy, you shake easy tonight,’ Charley chuckled.

‘Little trouble with one of the stable, that’s all. Besides, I didn’t think no one was out here but me.’

Charley stabbed a finger toward the direction of the girl had gone.

‘Any time you get tired of her, you let me know, okay?’

‘You keep your hands off, friend, or—’

Charley put up both hands defensively. ‘Hey—hey! Just joking.’ He grinned. ‘But I got to say that you sure are a cruel master. The lady said she was sick. My stable don’t even try that bit no more, not since I made the last one who did drink a whole bottle of castor oil.’

‘Hey, that’s pretty good,’ Yancy said approvingly. ‘Yeah, I got to get me some of that. Hey, what’s *that*?’

‘That what?’

‘Shhh! Listen. *That!* That flapping sound.’

Charley listened. Now he heard it too. It was getting louder, and sounded as if it were right over their heads. He looked up and screamed.

So did Yancy as first contact was made. Fighting off the biting creatures, both men clawed their way to the door of Tommy Little’s. Yancy’s hand closed around the doorknob. ‘I can’t open it!’ he yelled.

‘*Hit it!*’ Charley cried.

As the door crashed inward from the weight of the two men’s shoulders, Tom the Wrist moved out quickly from behind the bar.

‘What in the cold blue hell is going on?’ he demanded.

When he got his answer he couldn’t believe it. Nor could his customers who, with the bartender, were suddenly fighting for their lives.

Several of them made it out alive. But not Yancy, Charley or Tom the

Wrist.

It was just after one in the morning when, like a compact arrowhead, seven leather-winged bats crashed through the window of a house within the confines of Carl Schurz Park. One of the creatures, the largest, which was marked over the eyes with a red blood-drop, scurried around the interior of the empty room, then deposited an envelope it had been holding between its teeth on the top of a desk within. Then, with a cry of command, it led the others back through the way they had entered.

The house was Gracie Mansion, the official residence of the mayor of New York.

Chapter Two

From his bedroom on the third floor of Damien Harmon's thirty-five-room Westhampton manor, Cameron Sanchez could hear the wind moaning through the thick branches of pine which, completely surrounding the great house, brushed its exterior surface as with a vengeance, as if they were making known their agony in the chilling wind which cut through their shanks to the very quick, making their discomfort known and punishing, with their incessant scraping and occasional crashing, the human occupants of the house—as if they were responsible for planting those initial seeds from which came life, a life which was not joyful but, in the late fall and winter seasons at least, an unholy curse which had to be endured.

Cam Sanchez was used to the moans and the brushing branches. Too, he had become used to the sound of the crashing surf rhythmically beating against, and slowly and punishingly eating its way into, the southern Long Island shoreline some fifty black-night yards from his window. Sounds of nature in turmoil, sounds of nature gone wild. But sounds he had become used to.

Thus they were not the reason for his sudden awakening. And it had been sudden. His every sense was fully alert, but he did not move. Except for his eyelids opening, his six-five frame of steel-like muscle remained still, exactly as it was—on its right side, relaxed and naked under the sheet and blankets of his bed. Even the bullet-shaped head, completely hairless but for the thick black eyebrows, stayed motionless—except for the dark eyes which now scanned the portion of the room before them, seeking the cause of the sound which had awakened him.

The sound, the new, additional sound—

It was one of breathing. Breathing that was not his own.

And then there was something other than sound. A sudden, small pressure on the blankets near the small of his back.

Cam moved!

His left fist shooting backward and upward like a mighty sledgehammer, he thrust both legs in an arching, turning movement that brought his feet swiftly but steady to the hardwood flooring. The thrown fist having connected with nothing, it was now drawn back to a diagonal saber-defense before his chest, his right hand-blade crossed behind it.

The black cat on the bed purred with pleasure, its eyes reflecting pale green amusement in the moonlight. Then it disappeared.

'I suggest you get dressed,' said the girl in black now standing on the other side of the bed. Black crew-neck sweater, black slacks, black gloves. Around the milk-white oval face which made the word *beautiful* seem totally inadequate, black hair, straight and falling to a little more than shoulder-length. Black and white—and green, pale green amusement reflected still in

the moonlight.

‘Dressed,’ Cam repeated.

The woman smiled. ‘Unless you prefer to entertain guests in the raw.’ There was a slightly foreign accent to her voice, one which suggested that the speaker not only was not used to conversing in English, but that she found speech in *any* language a cumbersome, inefficient method of communication.

‘It’s not impossible,’ Cam replied.

‘I really don’t think *he’s* your type, Mr. Sanchez.’ She laughed. ‘As for myself, as I’ve told you previously, I’m not interested.’

That much was certainly true. She had made it abundantly clear that whatever physical charm he held for other women, this particular woman was not attracted by it. The sculptured features of his face relaxed, the dark Latin eyes grew a little warmer. There was, after all, no way that he could expect to charm a woman who, first, didn’t want to be charmed and, second, could read every thought in his mind the moment it was formed.

‘He?’ he asked.

‘Downstairs with the professor. I was asked to wake you.’

‘What time is it?’

‘Three, a little after.’

Cam pulled on a pair of jeans and slipped his feet into moccasins. A black and white striped shirt completed his dress.,

‘Three. A strange time to come calling.’

‘Perhaps the time is in keeping with the mission.’

‘Strange, you mean,’ Cam said, opening the door to his room. ‘Perhaps. One thing, it’s in keeping with your method of awakening people.’

Again she laughed, her patrician face stirring him. He felt for a moment an awkwardness which was not in keeping with his years of experience with women. At a point in his early thirties, he should know better.

There was a purring quality to her voice. ‘I merely wanted to see your reaction. I was curious, that’s all.’

Curious, he thought. With *her* years of experience! After her couple of thousand years, *she* should know better!

Damien Harmon and his guest were seated before the fireplace in the great first floor study. A fresh log had been placed on the coals of the blaze which had warmed the manor during the earlier hours, and warmth was beginning to return to the room.

As Cam entered, Harmon waved him to a chair. He then pointed to a second. ‘Please, Ktara—I’d like you to stay as well. Our nocturnal visitor has been telling me some interesting things.’

As the woman in black sat, the visitor shot to his feet.

‘*Interesting!* Damien, I hardly came all the way out here to talk about something only interest—’

‘Please sit down, Sandy. It will keep us all on equal footing.’

Harmon said it pleasantly, but it was obvious to Capi that he meant his

words to mildly stun the large round man, who had begun to lose control of himself. It was very rare for Harmon to mention his disability, that break in his lower spine which had confined him to a wheelchair since 1938. A brash young man he had been then, and a New York hoodlum's lead pipe—a lead pipe which also was responsible for the metal plate cupped around the frontal lobes of his brain—had been his reward for ignoring the orders of his police force superior. He was further rewarded by dismissal from his job, a job he'd wanted even though his two doctorate and one master's degrees qualified him for something more intellectual, and his vast inherited wealth made working at anything totally unnecessary. He'd tried the academic life, but retired at fifty in order to devote himself to two areas of study—and action. Crime and the occult.

Cam Sanchez had reason to be glad the professor had kept up his interest in crime. Had not the old man moved in his own case three years previously, the Puerto Rican ex-cop would probably be doing a long stretch of time for possession of heroin. It had been a frame, but the tough rookie patrolman couldn't have handled it himself. He had worked for Damien Harmon since.

As to the old man's interest in the occult, that Cam was not overly happy about. Early in the game, he had dismissed it as nothing more than a harmless pastime on Harmon's part—although he felt the man's genius could have been put to better uses. But then, when the harmless pastime had moved them both into this present game—

Cam's head jerked up. The large round man seemed to be voicing the Puerto Rican's very thoughts.

'Vampires,' Sanford Proctor said.

Damien Harmon's eyes flickered to those of Cam and Ktara, then rested on those of his old friend, who had taken his suggestion and now was seated. He was not, however, calm. Cam did not know much of Proctor other than that he and Harmon had been friends since the year they both joined the New York Police, and that, although retired officially, Proctor still did 'little jobs' now and then for the city. He knew as well that this friend of Harmon's still could get things done in official circles with little more than a phone call.

'Vampire bats,' the round man continued. 'Trained to kill.' Briefly, he explained the three murderous events which had taken place earlier.

'A random attack pattern,' Harmon observed. 'There would seem to be no rhyme nor reason to the selection of targets.'

Proctor agreed. 'Only there is, Damien. The targets were preselected to demonstrate the abilities of the person responsible. The UN first. Then out to Long Island. Then back to Manhattan. No time lost between. A perfect execution of a predetermined plan.'

'You're sure of that?' the professor asked.

'Dead sure. The note left on the mayor's desk—it specifies times and places for the attacks, and the short time span from the last hit to the placing of the note hardly allows for it to be prepared in the interim.'

The brow under Harmon's leonine silver hair wrinkled. Grasping the chair handles, he used the power of his bull-like shoulders to lift his back higher.

'All right, Sandy. If tonight's killings were a demonstration, what was the point of it?'

'Money. Now having demonstrated his powers, the master of the bats has specified in his note that, unless he is paid the sum of one million dollars, we can expect more incidents—with the United Nations being the primary target and with the importance of those executed rising with the passage of time.'

Cam's respect for Proctor went up a notch. That he was called in on a problem of this magnitude showed the reputation the old man enjoyed with the city fathers who were charged with the protection of the UN's premises and people.

Harmon cleared his throat. 'I have two questions, Sandy. First, how is the money to be paid and when?'

'That is to be specified today—by telephone to the mayor. The second question?'

'Why me? Why did you come here tonight? How is it you think I can help?'

There was a silence, punctuated by the snapping flames from the fireplace. Proctor spoke cautiously.

'Twice in the very recent past you've been involved in matters in which you've asked my assistance. One concerned that hijacking operation here on Long Island of which you were a victim. ¹ The other had to do with that drug cult and undertaker business in San Francisco, ² In both cases there were attendant rumors of vampires or vampire bats. I seek no explanation from you regarding this, Damien, and I have no intention of using whatever influence I have to pry into what are your own affairs. I merely ask your help.'

Harmon nodded thoughtfully, his eyes scanning the room and resting upon Ktara.

'This note you speak of, Sandy. Do you have it with you?'

'No. The laboratory people are working with it.'

'Use my telephone—right now. Tell them to stop whatever they're doing with it. I want it delivered here as soon as possible.'

'Surely, Damien, the police laboratories are better equipped than yours!'

There was an edge to Harmon's voice. 'That may be, Sandy. But we have, perhaps, some special expertise we can bring to bear on that document. It is, I believe, our special expertise you have requested. Or am I mistaken? The telephone is on the desk.'

Proctor used one of the two instruments on the desk top. After making arrangements for the letter to be hand-delivered to Harmon with all speed, he pulled from his inside jacket pocket a thick leather wallet.

'Damien, it may be necessary for you to have a special pass which is recognized by the police department. I'll sign one for you—and for Cam. Will two be sufficient?' His eyes were on the woman dressed in black.

‘No,’ Hannon replied.

‘Three, then,’ Proctor said, extracting that number of cards from his wallet.

‘Four,’ the professor corrected.

‘Four?’

Harmon repeated the number..

Cam saw their visitor to his car. Returning through the front door, he heard the telltale sound of the special elevator which gave his employer access to all three floors of the old house and to the basement below. He knew that the basement was where he would find Harmon now. As Proctor had stood up to leave, there was no mistaking the satisfied smile on Harmon’s face. There was also no mistaking the thought that lay behind it.

A new challenge worthy of their involvement—of the involvement of him who waited below.

He made a quick sign of the cross and unbolted the hall door to the stairwell.

During the recent restoration of the old manor, the workmen had attempted to brighten up the dark basement. In addition to the new laboratory benches and work shelves, they had installed bright fluorescent lighting and painted the walls a shimmering white. But it hadn’t worked. The dankness of the great room seemed to be permeated with a primeval something as old as time itself, a kind of mystic darkness that was able to surround the lighting with a tentative haze, an intangible spider-web mist, which turned the brightness of the walls into the chilling white of exposed bone. The shadows cast by the items of chemistry and electronic equipment which covered tables and shelves did not help the overall effect, but even without them—without the vagaries of the grotesque which permeated the room below the old house—no amount of the interior designer’s skill or funds to turn ideas into reality ever could eradicate from the place the chilling feel of the unholy.

Not as long as *it* was there, resting in the center of the block stone floor. The earth-filled casket of Count Dracula,:

It was a sight Cam never had looked forward to, from that first time under the Transylvania mountain till the present. True, the sympathetic electronic implants within the vampire and Harmon had kept the Count under their control—but just barely. By telekinetic power, Harmon had been able to drive the thin sliver cut from the stake they had removed from the vampire heart back into that black organ. The linked devices—as well as the tiny transceiver-communicator which had been implanted behind the Count’s ear—were scientific triumphs, as Cam well knew. In that province Harmon was a giant. But there were other kinds of knowledge, as Cam’s old grandmother had constantly reminded him in his boyhood days in Spanish Harlem:

‘This Science they teach in your school,’ the ancient *abuela* would say. ‘It is but one little room in a great building with many rooms. Some of those rooms stand high in the sunlight, but others are deep inside, away from the windows where the light cannot touch them. They are as dark closets in the

wide universe, and no man who worships Science alone will ever see beyond their locked doors.’

Now, with Cam’s help, Harmon had seen within one of those locked doors, had in fact unlocked it. But there were adjoining rooms, Cam knew, in which all the scientific skill Harmon could master would be of little help. In these rooms of dark knowledge, the creature who went by the name of Dracula was the master.

The Black Master. So he was called by Ktara, his ‘slave’, as she styled herself. Yet she was more than just slave to him, for, through several cycles, it had been this woman of many powers who each time sent to her Master his deliverer. She was slave to the cycle-curse itself, as the words of one of her *Runes* clearly said:

*When they—they—come and wrench apart
His living life, his pulsing heart,
Then I, his slave, at his last cry
Myself each time begin to die,
The process moving toward its end
Until I find the one to send,
The one who’ll come, the one who’ll take
From my Black Lord the killer stake.*

They, Harmon and he, had taken the stake from the vampire’s heart. Unlike all their predecessors, however, they had emerged with their blood still surging through their own bodies. But both of them knew well that one small mistake—one error of timing or judgement—

Again Cam made the sign of the cross.

‘Your request does not please me, Professor Harmon.’

Beneath the Count’s thick eyebrows, his eyes narrowed, his lips sliding back over the white teeth which now were only slightly larger than those of a normal man. In the fluorescent lighting of the basement, the face of Dracula took on those sharp edges which gave evidence that he truly was, as his Magyar name claimed, the Son of the Dragon. Even so, the face they saw now was benevolent when compared to that other face which both Harmon and Cam had had occasion to see—when the sleek black hair moved down the high-arched forehead, when the nostrils flattened and the lips moved back from teeth which were no longer simply teeth but the sharp fangs of a savage beast. Impressively powerful as the Dark Lord was in his ‘normal’ state, Harmon and Cam both knew that the physical strength of his body—which was greater in proportion than the Puerto Rican’s—was but a tenth of the real power he could muster.

The Son of the Dragon, clothed in formal black dinner dress, turned to Ktara. His speech too sounded as if the speech of humans was something foreign to him:

‘And you, my dear one—what say you to this request?’

The woman looked steadily back at her Master. 'It is not my place to say anything, my lord. It is your will, as always, which rules me.'

The Count's lips curled into a malevolent smile. He turned his attention back to Harmon.

'She speaks the words well, does she not, Professor? Even though we both know, you and I, that if it were my will alone which mattered I would not be here in this place and dining on the foul synthetic you have fashioned to satisfy my need for nourishment.'

Harmon smiled in return. 'That may be, but as you yourself have just said it is not your will alone which matters. That is why, Count Dracula, your use of the word *request* is not accurate. It is more in the nature of a *command*.

The Count's voice was level. 'I care nothing for your so-called United Nations. United! Do you not read your own newspapers? An ineffective gathering of puny humans exchanging insignificant words of diplomacy while their home governments conspire one against the other. To completely destroy this forum of hypocrisy would be a service in the name of Truth!'

The professor replied tensely, 'Your bit of philosophy notwithstanding, you will assist us. You will because I say you will, because of our agreement. Or is your memory faulty on matters you would rather not remember?'

'You refer to our wager,' Dracula said.

'I refer to your losing that wager. ³ The six months in which I am to have complete control over you—without your attempting to subvert that control—are far from over.'

'I am aware of that, Professor Harmon, and I intend to keep my word insofar as that is possible. But your request—or command, if you will—borders upon the impossible. I have no qualms regarding the taking of human life, as you well should know, but there are creatures upon this earth against which I will not raise my hand.'

Harmon nodded. 'The bats.'

'Among other living things, yes. Even such as I, with the powers at my disposal, operate under some constraints. I will not set myself against this species of life.'

'Will not? Or cannot?'

'That is none of your affair.'

A thought suddenly jumped into Cam's head, seemingly out of nowhere. But when he turned to the woman in black, he saw her eyes upon him. The thought definitely had not come from nowhere.

'Professor,' he said, 'perhaps you should make the point that we're not asking the Count to fight against the bats, but against whoever it is who controls them. That would not be contrary to his constraints, would it?'

Harmon smiled, 'Well, Count?'

'Who is this controller?'

'We do not yet know. You'll be helping us locate him?'

'You are certain, Harmon, that these are vampire bats—the type called by

your scientists *desmodontidae*?’

The professor frowned. ‘So it is said. We’ve not seen them, of course, but —’

‘But,’ the Count interrupted, ‘you are knowledgeable enough in such things to know that the so-called vampire bat is not an overly large creature, and also that it is a rarity in this region.’

Harmon nodded. It was true. The bat’s normal habitat was the tropical regions of Central and South America, and its usual size was quite small when compared with the creatures Proctor had described. Admittedly, Proctor’s description came from eye-witness accounts at Tommy Little’s, relayed through police questioners, so the size factor could be doubted. What could not be doubted was that the bats in all three attacks this night had been blood-suckers. Their victims provided unassailable evidence.

‘And something else, Professor. From your description of how these creatures behaved, they would appear to have been highly and skillfully trained. Breaking through windows, approaching very high light levels, attacking a moving train. Such things are close to being unbelievable.’

‘But conceivable? For example, you yourself could control a horde of bats and put them through the same motions?’

The Count seemed thoughtful. When he answered, his thick, low voice did not address the question directly:

‘Pray, Professor Harmon, that you have no opportunity to observe such a thing firsthand.’

Cam did not at all like the way the Count’s eyes flashed with excitement.

Chapter Three

A flash of a green hillside ... some kind of structure ... old house, maybe, but too fast... darkness, total black ... beam of flashlight piercing walls of rock, carved-out rock, natural—a cave, yes, a cave...

Sounds, little animal noises ... and the flapping of wings. ? a sense of many minds, alert, disturbed suddenly....

A laugh, high-pitched ... a wave of hate ... revenge for something going back in time, a long time ago ... a satisfied laugh....

More? Is there no more?

‘No,’ Ktara replied. ‘That’s all there is.’

Harmon opened his eyes, letting up on the pressure of his fingertips against his temples. ‘Dammit!’ he said through his teeth. Lifting the sheet of bond paper from his study desk, he stared down at it in disgust.

‘I assume the problem was the chemicals,’ he said to the woman.

‘They were most thorough,’ she responded.

Most thorough, Harmon thought to himself. The police sergeant had brought the note to him just after dawn with the message that the ‘boys downtown’ hoped he had better luck with it than they did. No prints, no telltale anything.

Harmon frowned. There might have been plenty of tales on that paper—before. Tales that Ktara could read. *Dammit!*

The message itself was quite simple. Formed from words cut from newspapers and magazines, it was directly to the point:

MR MAYOR. AT 9.15 someone *died* at the UN. AT 10.40 somebody died on Train to BABYLON. AT 11.45 *people* died at LITTLES. SHOWS you what I can do. MORE *will* die at UN and they will be people of Big rank unless you give me 1 MILLION *dollars*. STAY near Your *phone* all Morning. I will call and say *where* and How I want THE money. THIS is not a JOKE.

That last sentence hardly was necessary, Harmon thought to himself as one of the phones in the study rang.

Damien Harmon had a deeply ingrained and long-held hatred of telephones as being instruments the devil used to distract the mind from more important matters. In the six-story Manhattan brownstone which had been his headquarters prior to his trip to Castle Dracula, there had been no phones. But just as the Manhattan location would no longer do for the new operations, neither would the absence of what, in dire circumstances, might be a necessary means of communication.

In this instance, his hand eagerly moved to the receiver and placed it into the proper slot of the special speaker unit Cam had devised.

‘This is Harmon,’ he said.

It was Cam, calling from Gracie Mansion. ‘Just wanted to test the system. You’re hooked in solid. When the call comes through, you’ll hear it loud and

clear. Just keep your receiver where it is.'

'I assume there was no trouble with the authorities?'

Cam laughed. 'None. That little pass your friend Proctor provided seems to be a ticket to anyone anywhere anywhen. Did the note arrive?'

'It did, but it wasn't of much help.'

'Any clue as to place of origin? The police tracer units would have an edge if they knew the general location of the caller.'

'It's an edge they'll have to do without. All we've got is a green hilly countryside, such as the kind which surrounds the city for a good two hundred-seventy degrees. Even then, we've got no reason to be sure the latent image was a recent recollection. For all we know it could be some strong boyhood memory.'

'Okay, then, I guess that's all I can do around here—unless you can think of anything else.'

'No, nothing. Come on back and we'll do some serious thinking about breakfast.'

'Sanchez—that's the name, right?'

At the touch of the rough hand that grabbed the back of his shoulder, Cam whirled on his heel. The red-veined beefy face of the heavy man in the disheveled suit cracked into a one-sided smile. He and Cam were alone on the second floor landing.

'You remember me, Sanchez?'

Cam remembered. He felt his fingers tightening into hard fists, then relaxed. Hell, it had been three years—the finding of the heroin in his squad car, the investigation, his discharge from the force and the trial. From the beginning and through all of it, Detective Sergeant Hank Navarre had been relentless in his pressure. 'You had the makings of a good Spanish Harlem cop, kid,' he told Cam that first day. 'You had the right amount of toughness and the right amount of feeling for these people. But now you been found with the white stuff on your own fingers. When a cop goes wrong, boy, it's the job of other cops to clean up the mess.' And Hank Navarre had tried, right then and there in the cell where Cam Sanchez was being detained. Thanks to two station house cops, the attack was halted before it started, but Hank Navarre swore it wasn't over. 'Every ounce of determination I got, every minute of every working day, I'm putting onto your case, boy—and when it's over you're gonna find yourself behind thicker bars than these, for a long long time.'

The city had not been able to prove its case, but it wasn't for lack of trying—certainly not on the part of Hank Navarre.

'I remember you, Sergeant,' Cam said through his teeth.

The thickset plainclothesman took his hand from Cam's shoulder.

'Good, that's real good, boy. Except it's detective lieutenant now.'

'Congratulations. Now, if there's nothing else—'

The big cop moved in front of Cam.

‘But there *is* something else. I’d like to know just what it is you’re doing here.’

‘Thanks for your interest, but all that’s been explained to the proper people.’

Navarre nodded. ‘So I gather. But don’t you think it’s kind of odd? I mean, when I saw you come in this place, I asked some questions. And what do I find out? Special VIP pass for a special electronics expert. Now, ain’t that something? I mean, for somebody who got himself busted only three years ago—and who, three years ago, didn’t know a damned thing about electronics. What’d you do, boy—take some kind of super correspondence course?’

‘Something like that,’ Cam said with quiet control. ‘And maybe I took a course in the art of forgery, too, which would explain how a busted Puerto Rican could be flashing a heavy I.D. Maybe you’d better check that out, *Lieutenant*. But in the meantime I suggest you get yourself out of my way—before I do the job for you, piece by piece.’

The two pairs of eyes locked but for a moment. The beefy cop stepped aside.

‘Okay, Sanchez, you mark this one up as a small victory. But the war has just started. I thought I could forget about you some time ago. I see now I was wrong. Whatever it is you’re up to, boy, you’re not gonna make it. Wherever you go, whatever you do, you’re gonna feel traces of hot breath on the back of your shoulder, and it’s gonna be mine.’

‘Just one word of advice, then,’ Cam said. ‘Make sure I always feel it on the *back* of the shoulder, Navarre. If I find you in my way—just once—you’ll be looking like Humpty Dumpty. After the fall.’

Stupid!

Catching his own reflection in the window of the black station wagon, Cam scowled at his own deadly eyes. *Very stupid!* Letting Navarre rile him that way, letting the S.O.B. get under his skin to the tender parts. And then showing it, letting him see ...

But what was done was done, there was no changing things now. Opening the driver’s door, Cam slid behind the wheel. He slipped the key into the ignition, but didn’t turn it. Instead, he closed his eyes for a couple of seconds and inhaled deeply, then he let the air out slowly. When he opened his eyes the last vestiges of his rage were cooled. His hands went about the business of starting the wagon, his feet working the pedals, his eyes checking the mirrors

He recognized them for what they were immediately. Two plainclothesmen, being overly obvious in their nonobservance of the black station wagon and its driver, being all too casual in their slow unhurried walk to their own vehicle, a dark green Pontiac.

Cam slowly accelerated the wagon as it moved out of the driveway, keeping watch of the rearview mirror. Something wasn’t right. They were *too*

slow. If in fact they were detailed to keep track of him—and Cam was willing to bet his left arm that was their assignment—he'd be out of their range of vision within minutes. Unless—

Unless they were spot-watching him, with a new team picking him up once he hit the avenue. But as the wagon pushed out onto East End Avenue there was no evidence of any pick-

up. Nor did anything look unusual as he moved onto F.D.R. Drive heading south. He gunned the wagon up to seventy-five and held the accelerator there from Seventy-Second Street to Sixtieth. Here he debated taking the Queensboro Bridge across to the Island, but discarded the idea. Instead he kept on the F.D.R. until Fifty-Third, where with a sudden wheeling to the right he cut back into the crosstown traffic.

For two full blocks. Then he double-parked.

And watched.

Nothing. Nothing at all.

Okay, they weren't tailing him. That left only one alternative, which he should have thought of before, having planted enough of the little devices himself. He pressed a button under the glove compartment. With a low hum, a black panel slid back over the transmission hump. A click of a switch and the glass target-circled surface glowed a dull green from beneath. Directly in the center was a small bright dot of white. That was the wagon's signal. Nothing else showed. Cam grinned. It was too much to expect that their unit would be on the same frequency. There were four knobs just below the ground glass. Cam began turning the one to the far left. The white signal disappeared. Within ten seconds, another took its place.

Within twenty seconds, Cam had located the unit. It was inside the right curve of the rear bumper, not a very effective place for a spot-and-audio combination unit, a standard make about the size of a twenty-five-cent piece. In his own work, Cam had been able to get the size down to a penny. Navarre hadn't been too far off the mark when he'd termed the Puerto Rican a special electronics expert. The professor had an excellent technical library, and his assistant had a natural aptitude—so much so that, even though he'd never attended a college class, Cam Sanchez could hold his own in any electronics lab in the U.S., whether government, academic or industrial.

The unit remained where it was as Cam got back behind the wheel. He moved down Second Avenue within the speed limit, then turned east onto Forty-Second Street, taking the Midtown Tunnel to Queens. Once on the Long Island Expressway, his eyes now and then glanced from the morning traffic to particular places at the side of the road. Very particular places—gasoline stations. He was on the Expressway for fifteen minutes before he found one which would do.

'Fill it,' he told the attendant.

'Extra, sir?'

'Er, yes—Extra,' he said, stepping from the wagon and looking to see just

what brand it was he was buying. Brand preference had nothing to do with his choice of station, not this time. Moving to the rear of the car, he intensely inspected the bumper, his hand seeming to push on it from behind.

‘Sounded like something was loose back here,’ he explained, then stepped around the pumps to admire a Dodge camper loaded with all kinds of paraphernalia that spoke paragraphs of some harried father traveling cross country with his wife and, from the look of it, at least four kids.

It was the empty camper, its owner no doubt in the adjacent diner, which had dictated his choice of gas station. The camper and its Maine license plates.

It was behind the rear license plate that Cam placed the bug.

He was thinking of the little trip one of Navarre’s men had in front of him when he spotted the large words on the side of the station office. He still was chuckling when he returned to the wagon.

‘Something funny?’ the attendant said.

Cam nodded. ‘Your sign.’

Replacing the gas cap, the attendant followed Cam’s eyes, then shrugged. Nothing funny about that sign. Most all the station’s dealing in this brand displayed it. *Happy Motoring* was all it said.

At his desk in the study, Harmon set down his coffee cup and delivered his opinion. The black cat curled up in the easy chair was not interested.

‘Hank Navarre is a good cop, an honest cop. Regardless of what you think of him and he thinks of you, you can’t deny that, Cameron. Otherwise he wouldn’t be on this special detail.’

‘I’m not denying anything. All I’m saying is that the last thing we want is somebody who’s got his badge covered by a trench coat hanging around this place. It won’t take Navarre very long to peg me to you, not if he’s as good as we both think he is.’

‘But my official residence is in Manhattan, Cam. He’ll probably stake that out for a night or two, then give up.’ Harmon frowned. ‘No, he won’t give up, will he? Well, after this bat business is over, I’ll drop a word to Sandy that I want Navarre’s heat off. Until then, he’ll have his hands full. In the meantime —’

The sound stopped him. It was a sound that he shouldn’t have been hearing.

The ringing of the telephone.

Harmon stared at the instrument—both instruments. One, though independent, was basically a ‘roll-over’ number in the event the first was busy. The fire receiver was still set in the callbox. The problem was that the second number was known to no one except himself and Cam. The first number was known to one additional person.

Harmon picked up the receiver. ‘Sandy?’

‘The mayor got the call. Ten minutes ago.’

‘Ten—but we heard nothing!’ He looked to the big cat, which stared back

blankly at him.

‘I know,’ Proctor said. ‘Your man’s connections didn’t hold. I’ve just viewed his hook-ups.’

‘Just a minute,’ Haimon said. Placing the second receiver in the speaker unit, he asked his friend to repeat what he’d just said.

‘The hook-up didn’t hold. One of the wires was loose. I saw it myself.’

Cam’s face reddened. ‘Look, Mr. Proctor—’

Harmon interrupted. ‘All right. More important, what did the man say?’

‘The money is to be placed on top of the Delacorte clock at the children’s zoo in Central Park at midnight tonight. It is to be in small bills in ten paper-wrapped packages. That’s it.’

‘Nothing more? No warning about not bringing police in?’

‘Nothing of that kind. He—and it is a he, Damien—doesn’t appear worried about that. Also, he was smart enough to want to keep the conversation short. Our boys got no trace at all. Since you didn’t hear the original, would a tape help? We’ve got it.’

Harmon jerked his head to the chair in which the cat had been sitting. The woman now curled up with her legs beneath her shook her head no. Ktara had her limitations, Harmon knew, he had just discovered another.

‘No, Sandy. One question, though—’

‘Two questions,’ Cam broke in. ‘The first is how the hell that connection got loose!’

A pause. ‘I have no idea, young man. I merely happened to be at hand near your installation when I mentioned to a police technician that I hoped the second listener got more out of it than we did. He pointed out that he didn’t think so in that there was no connection. The lieutenant in charge said something about amateur work. I don’t mean to demean your efforts but—’

‘Lieutenant,’ Cam repeated. ‘That would be Navarre—Hank Navarre.’

‘Why, yes. I believe that’s what he told me his name was.’ Harmon spoke now. ‘Sandy, you’ve said nothing about the mayor’s response. Does he plan to pay the million dollars?’

Another pause. ‘We are placing a heavy cordon around the UN as soon as darkness falls.’

‘You didn’t answer my question.’

‘That’s true. No, Damien, there will be no money on that clock tonight.’

‘And how do you evaluate the wisdom of that decision?’

‘I’ve not been asked officially to make such an evaluation.’

‘For God’s sake, Sandy, get that money on that clock tonight! It’s the only chance we’ve got to track the man to his lair!’

Proctor spoke quietly. ‘There’s no need to shout at me, Damien. I’ve done my share of shouting already. The answer is no.’

‘In which case there will be further bloodshed tonight.’

‘I have no doubt about that. But the lines of defense will be thick.’

Ktara smiled. ‘Mr. Proctor, your lines will be thick around the United

Nations. What makes you think he will strike there and not elsewhere?’

‘Because, young lady, that is precisely what he told us he would do.’

Chapter Four

‘Spartacus—here, boy!’

The huge cave was dark, its upper portions black as pitch, its naturally carved rock walls lighted but dimly from the three kerosene lamps placed at intervals on top of the long unpainted table which, in addition to the lamps, bore a variety of metal and wood contraptions that, collectively, resembled nothing as much as a miniature carnival.

There was one circular object that looked like a Ferris wheel, another that was a see-saw. There was a tightrope and a little swing which dangled from a gallows like armature. And there were panes of glass and boxes and spheres with strings attached, the functions of which were not obvious at first glance.

‘Spartacus?’

The thin man seated before the table spoke in a whisper. In his late sixties by appearance, his gray hair was untrimmed, uncombed and looked unclean. Obviously filthy were his clothes, which once had been white, and a threadbare dinner coat with tails. Both coat and pants, in their better days, had been essential tools of Adrian Abelard’s trade—in *his* better days. It was into one of the several inside coat pockets that his right hand went now as, extracting it, his fingers brought with them a battered deck of playing cards.

‘Come, Spartacus,’ he said, a bit louder than before. ‘Come, boy, I wish to test your devotion to learning. *Spartacus?*’

There was a rapid flutter of something above his head, up in the dark reaches of the high cave ceiling. The noise grew louder, then ceased as the large bat took its place on one of the several makeshift perches on the table top.

‘Good boy—now, come on, pick a card.’

The deck was now fanned expertly in the hand which thrust the cards before the bat, directly in front of the mark over its eyes which resembled a drop of red blood.

‘Come on, come on—any card. Any card at all!’

Slowly the winged creature moved its head from side to side, almost as if it were scanning the backs of the cards held before it. Then with a deliberate stab forward of its upper half, the bat closed its teeth over one of the pieces of tattered cardboard and pulled it from its mates.

‘Got it? Okay—now don’t tell me what it is. I’ll tell you. The Ace of Spades, right?’

With a squeal, the bat’s mouth opened, the card dropping to the table top, face down.

Adrian Abelard cackled. ‘Let’s take a look-see, hey? Let’s see if I was—’
‘*Adrian!*’

The voice came from a section of the rock wall that was darker than those surrounding it. The man stepping through the narrow passage and into the

cave proper was dressed in a long white laboratory coat. Except for the cleanliness of his coat and his overall neatness, the second man was identical in build to the first. Identical as to his face as well,

‘Adrian, what are you up to?’

The dirty man in the black coat turned toward the other and held a forefinger to his lips. ‘Be quiet for a just a moment, August. I have to check the card.’

‘Adrian, I’ve told you I don’t want—’

‘*Haaahh!*’ Adrian Abelard cried triumphantly, holding the card high as if to show it to whatever demons might inhabit the darkness above.

As if on cue, a chorus of beating leather wings replied from the black heights. The bat on the perch, however, remained stationary, not moving a muscle.

‘Good boy, Spartacus,’ Adrian said. ‘You’re not a sore loser, are you, lad? Want to try it again?’

But as the hand again fanned out the deck, a second hand swept across the table. The cards scattered every which way.

Adrian Abelard glared at his twin brother, then dropped his eyes under the fierce orbs which had stared into his.

‘You think all of this is a joke, don’t you, Adrian?’

‘August, I didn’t mean anything by—’

‘Answer me. You don’t believe this, all this’—he gestured to the cave and to the table—‘is going to accomplish anything. Isn’t that right?’

‘August, I didn’t say—’

‘You don’t have to *say*, Brother. I am quite capable of recognizing contempt when I see it. However, you will not interfere

with my work. You will not upset my little friends—*will not*. Do you understand me?’

Adrian Abelard stood. ‘August, I meant nothing by it. I just like to play with the—your little friends. They’re my friends, too, especially old Spartacus here.’

‘Spartacus!’

‘You have nothing against the name, Brother?’

August Abelard exhaled. ‘No. No, Adrian, I have nothing against the name. As a matter of fact, it’s an excellent choice. Spartacus: the slave turned gladiator who led his people out of poverty. That is precisely what our Spartacus will do for us. You do believe that, don’t you, Brother?’

‘Sure I do, August. Fame and fortune, just like the good old days.’

‘Fame and fortune, yes, Adrian, but not, definitely not, like what you call the good old days. The Great Abelard! Great? The only great thing about you then was the adjective you chose to advertise yourself and your cheap magic act.’

‘It was not cheap!’ Adrian countered, the bat wings above punctuating his objection. ‘I was good, very good. I had a long run.’

‘Certainly you did, but you worked for next to nothing, and when vaudeville died., you died right along with it. There are magicians in night clubs, there are magicians on television—still to this day, Adrian. You are not among them and never will be, not at any price.’

The brother in the long black coat sat down again. ‘I wish you would not keep saying things like that,’ he said dully.

‘I say them because they’re true. We must be realistic. Look at me. I’m realistic. I readily admit that I can’t get an academic posting in my specialty or in anything relating to it. I admit that I haven’t been able to do so for fifteen years.’ He stared upward at the high recesses of the cave. ‘Incompetence, they said. Wasting the university’s money on a foolish project. But I’ve shown them, Adrian, I’ve shown them!’

‘You haven’t *shown* anybody anything,’ the dull voice responded.

‘But I have *done* it, haven’t I? I’ve successfully cross-bred the vampire bat with other larger and more intelligent species—and I’ve trained them, trained them to perform at impossible levels. At least, impossible in the eyes of so-called experts.’

‘In that case, Brother, why have you not shared your secret with the world, so that all this fame and fortune you speak of will at last come to us?’

August replied brightly. ‘Soon, Adrian, soon. Within a month, I shall have what I want from them. Perhaps in weeks, maybe even days.’

Adrian nodded. ‘The fifth group.’

‘Yes. They are learning, but slowly. Let us see how they do today.’

He took a whistle from his lab-coat pocket and blew a short two-note signal. The large bat called Spartacus shook his head, then as the signal was repeated, left its perch and flew up into the darkness.

‘You see? He knows that’s not his call. The smartest one of all is our Spartacus—and you warp his mind with cheap card tricks!’

If Adrian had an answer in his mind, it never got through his lips. Suddenly the air above him was beating furiously with wings. As he moved backward hurriedly, some forty bats noisily descended onto the table—or onto their appointed places on the contraptions which covered it.

They were still as stone. Not a wing fluttered, not a sound issued from the sharp-toothed mouths beneath their closed eyes.

‘How they hate the light, Adrian! Do you see? And yet they will open their eyes when I command them to. They will perform according to my will!’ With which he again blew on the little whistle.

And suddenly the table was a flurry of activity. Wheels rotated, see-saws went up and down, swings were swinging, water was splashing. Bats were diving from boards, walking tightropes, flying through hoops, swinging, wheel-turning. It was a carnival—a carnival of demons.

‘See them, Adrian! See them. Not perfect, no, not as good as the other four groups. But soon, Brother, soon. These and the others shall lead the Brothers Abelard from poverty. Yes, Spartacus—an excellent, excellent name!’

And as the wheels continued to spin and see-saws went up and down, August Abelard laughed over the noise. It was a high-pitched hysterical laugh, one which made his unkempt brother cringe.

He knew the insanity was coming on again, to hold its maniacal sway for its relentless hour or two. Or more.

Chapter Five

It was 8.15 when Cam nosed the black station wagon toward the line of gray wooden horses blocking off First Avenue from Forty-Second Street. One of the squad of policemen stationed in front of the blockade moved to the driver's side.

'Sorry. No admittance to this area tonight.'

'I know,' Cam said. 'I've got a pass.'

A flashlight clicked on and was trained onto the plastic rectangle Cam displayed.

'Yes, sir,' the patrolman said, then motioned for an opening to be made for the wagon. Cam drove through the police line slowly. He got as far as the Forty-Third Street blockade when he was again stopped.

'Pass,' the uniformed policeman demanded. Cam had it ready. 'Okay, sir. You can proceed ahead. If you leave your vehicle here, we'll park it for you.'

Cam shook his head. 'I'm supposed to take it up to at least Forty-Seventh.'

The policeman moved to the front of the wagon and checked the license plates. 'Sorry,' he said when he returned. 'I've got a list, and you're not on it. The car stays with me.'

'Check to the rear of the back seat,' Cam said. 'See all that equipment? I'm supposed to bring it to the north end. You want to help me try and muscle it up there?'

The cop looked at the jerry-rigged batteries and what appeared to be an electronic arsenal. He also looked at the large black cat nestled between two of the components.

He shrugged. 'Look, first of all, nobody told me nothing about anybody coming with special equipment. Secondly, I stay here no matter what until I hear from a superior. Thirdly—'

'Thirdly, just who the hell is running this show?'

'Sir?'

Cam repeated himself. Then: 'Check with a Mr. Sanford Proctor, tell him Sanchez is here with a wagon and wants clearance.'

'I never heard the name Proctor.'

'In which case, just check with the top guy whose name you do know, and ask *him* to check with Proctor.'

The patrolman shrugged and moved to a mobile unit. Three minutes later, a black sedan roared south along the car-empty First Avenue and screeched to a halt beside the wagon.

'Mr. Sanchez,' said the man in the rear seat.

'Mr. Proctor,' Cam acknowledged. 'I assume I can get on with it?'

Sanford Proctor looked to the younger man beside him. It was a face Cam recognized. One corner of his mouth curled into a sardonic smile.

The commissioner of police nodded. 'It's all right,' he told the uniforms

surrounding Cam's wagon. 'He can take his vehicle wherever he likes.'

'Mr. Proctor!' Cam said. 'I'd appreciate your accompanying me. I've got a message for you.'

Sanford Proctor looked straight into the belligerent eyes of the bullet-headed Puerto Rican. Then, shrugging, he opened the rear door of the sedan and walked around to open the front passenger door of the wagon. As he slid into the seat, he again focused his eyes on Cam.

'I knew you Latin types had your hot-headed streaks, but aren't you carrying yours a little too far?'

The question took Cam by surprise. Realizing his mouth was wide open, he closed it. It stayed closed as Proctor continued:

'You think you've been wronged by the city officials. All right, I think so too—and I've checked you out thoroughly. I did that some time ago, when Damien decided that for his own reasons he would enter the fray on your behalf. That was three years ago. Three years is a long time to be harboring a grudge, but that's your business. My business is to see that your private feelings don't get in the way of the job we have to do tonight. Is that understood?'

'Clearly,' Cam answered. He extracted from his windbreaker pocket a small hand-sized communicator. Pressing a button to the side of the unit, he passed it to Proctor. 'The professor,' he said in explanation.

'Damien?' Proctor said into the unit.

Harmon's voice came through like a bell. 'Update me, Sandy. What's been happening since I talked to you?'

Quickly Proctor covered the precautions that were being taken. Rings of police surrounded the UN Buildings, sharpshooters were spotted on the rooftops and on Welfare Island, and units also were located around the children's zoo. 'The whole thing may end right there, if we're lucky. Our man will be sending somebody to the clock to collect. If he comes himself, we're hoping to trap him.'

'Don't bet too much on it,' Harmon said.

'I'm not that much of a gambler, Damien.'

Harmon grunted. 'But the decision-makers are, my friend. I'd feel a lot better about this if that money were on the clock at midnight.'

'I tried. All day I've been trying, with no results. Their theory is that if we can destroy the bats our man has nothing left to throw at us.'

'And if you can't destroy them?'

A pause. 'Then we will have met the enemy face to face, and we will know what we're up against. Dammit, Damien, I don't like this setup any better than you do, but I'm powerless to change it. If bullets don't stop these things tonight, then maybe they'll be willing to listen.'

'We won't be relying on bullets alone,' Harmon said. 'Look in the back of the wagon.'

Proctor did. 'Yes. Cats are rather effective against vermin, and the bats *are*

vermin.'

'Let's not be overly humorous,' Harmon said seriously. He then explained the function of the equipment which was in the back of the station wagon.

'All very scientific and straightforward,' Proctor commented. 'I must say I was expecting something a little more—well, a little more—'

'Bizarre?' Harmon asked.

'Well, yes, bizarre.'

A chuckle. 'You have set up your first and second lines of defense, Sandy. We have ours as well. Our first line is, as you say, quite straightforward. Our second—well, it might qualify as bizarre. It might indeed.'

At fifteen minutes before midnight the entire grounds of the UN Headquarters were still. Only the distant sounds of traffic beyond the cordoned-off six-block area pierced the chill of the night air. It was a bright night, the silver light of the almost full moon filtering through the haze over the scene—haze formed by the eerie combination of river mist and industrial discharge.

Movement, both on the ground and on the rooftops of the four main buildings of the UN complex and those facing toward them on three sides, was minimal. The uniformed men who shared the roof of the General Assembly Building with Cam stood quietly, their eyes trained to all points of the compass. Waiting. Between forty and fifty men on this rooftop alone. All told, more than two hundred men detailed to the operation. All with weapons ranging from Browning automatic rifles with infrared scopes to flamethrowers.

Bizarre.

Cam reflected on the word. Surely this scene qualified. It was as if somehow he had been transported back to medieval times. There they were, the defenders of the castle, high on the walls, waiting for the attack to come, weaponed with the best that present technology could provide, waiting ... for as bizarre an enemy as the modern or Dark Age mind could imagine.

At the northward edge of the roof, Cam spun the cylinder of his large pistol, looking with satisfaction at the copper-colored slug-ends which reflected the moon-haze in what was almost a golden hue. The .357 Smith & Wesson was his favorite handgun. A real man-stopper. He laughed to himself, *at* himself. The beauty of the Magnum was that you didn't have to be all that accurate; hit a man anywhere and he was off his pins, usually with at least a couple of broken bones. But just how effective would the weapon be when trained on a small airborne target zeroing in for the kill much like a bullet fired from another gun?

In any case, the Magnum was a comfort. And Cam wouldn't be relying on it—he hoped. Much more to the point—he also hoped—would be the rifle-type device which was hooked up to the battery-powered equipment at his feet. For what seemed to be the thousandth time, he checked the dials. The set range spanned a full hundred thousand cycles per second down to twenty

thousand, full operative distance slightly less than a half-mile with maximum battery power. Operative, that is, if the idea worked, if the creatures' sonar-equivalent functioned within the set range. And, although the text-books said the contrary wasn't likely, it was still an *if*. Back at Westhampton, Ktara had summed it up nicely:

'The size and the reported habits of these creatures indicate a genetic tampering over and beyond mere training of habits. It

may be that your jamming device, as you call it, will be useless in practice.'

Cam had argued his case. 'Regardless of tampering, the emission of their signals still ought to be within this wide range.'

'Ought to, yes. But that is not my point. Even if you are directly on target, the fact of genetic change in addition to intensive training might make your offense useless. These creatures have been forced into what is an unnatural *adaptation*. If the adaptation skill is deeply enough ingrained, the onslaught of your attack will cause them to ... well, it is like when you drive an automobile and find you are in the wrong gear. You simply shift. The response is almost automatic, but you have effectively countered the change in circumstance.'

In summary, the whole thing might not work.

Ktara's reasons were scientific. Detective Lieutenant Navarre's were more personal. The big-gut policeman was running the operation on the north section of the General Assembly Building roof. If he had not decided that was the best place for him to be, Cam would have changed locations. As it was, he could do nothing much other than curse the Fates.

'Well, well,' Navarre greeted him with a sneer. 'What does our scientific genius have with him tonight? More little wires that will screw up when the test comes? And a pretty black kitty cat, too!'

'Stay clear of me,' Cam said levelly.

Navarre held his hands up in mock fear. 'Oh, I will, I will! I've got my orders. You're to be treated like you were King Charles the Fifth. I figure it must be National Junk Pusher Week or something—maybe it's Be-Kind-To-Cops-Found-On-The-Take Week for all I know. You know how it is, Sanchez. The big guys up on top make the decisions. Theirs to reason why, the rest of us just to bumble along and do what we're told, right?'

The big cop had grinned cheerfully. 'One thing, though. I know you're real careful and all that, but when things start happening—if they do—try real hard to stay out of my boys' way. I wouldn't want it said that I let one of the commissioner's pets get caught in a cross-fire. You know what I mean?'

The way Navarre looked from the muzzle of the flamethrower he held to Cam left no doubt about what he meant.

Midnight. His eyes scanning the western and northern horizons, Cam saw nothing of interest, only the tiny specks of red glow from the ends of cigarettes from the rooftops across the street. Beyond them the lights of New York lit up the night as usual.

As usual. It was true. The life of the city always moved along at its own pace, regardless of whatever drama—no matter how *unusual*—was being played out somewhere within its midst. Somewhere out there right now somebody was making love, somebody was screaming at his wife, somebody was mainlining a jittery syringe of heroin, somebody was being born, somebody was dying of cancer, somebody was bitching about the cost of living, somebody was being knifed to death on a dark street.

And somebody, out there somewhere near the children's zoo, was looking for a million dollars wrapped up in ten neat packages.

When he discovered they weren't there...

Central Park at midnight is no place for the typical New York citizen. Not only is this an example of discretion being the better part of valor, but it also is a law enforced by Manhattan's mounted police who patrol the pathways with a scrutiny that somehow does not always extend itself to ferreting out the inhabitants of the dark underpasses who by night seek only a place of shelter against the cold and by day pray for the generosity of some passerby whose ten or twenty-five cents will go toward the purchase of a bottle of cheap wine.

Those who work or dwell in the park at night rarely look skyward, even if a sound from that quarter should compete for attention. For the attention must be kept at ground level. That is where the dangers are—behind a tree or fountain or bench, within the shadows of natural or man-made caves of vegetation or stone. On the surface of path or hill, never upward.

Thus no eyes saw the cause of the gentle flapping of a single pair of wings as the lone bat's low-level flight pattern moved southward down the eastern strip of the park. Past Ninety-Sixth, then Eighty-Sixth, Seventy-ninth, past the Seventy-Second Street entrance, it moved unobserved—even as it moved lower, sailing across the Sixty-Fifth Street entrance to the Park, where the special detachment of watchers began.

The cars appeared unobtrusive, sitting along the park side of Fifth Avenue. They were unmarked, the five of them. Each contained one man, each man equipped with a pair of binoculars, his weapon, and his communication unit. Beyond this front line of observers, in clusters dotting the points of the compass surrounding the children's zoo, were some sixty armed men. They were too far from the scene to be observers. They would

move only when directed to do so by the men with the binoculars. They were not expected to see anything, and they didn't.

Neither did the men in the cars.

No, that is not precisely true.

Two of those who waited saw the dark winged creature fly into the double circle of their lenses, but did not give much thought to the event. Whatever it was—a bat maybe, a bird probably—it didn't come to rest anywhere near the big clock. In fact it didn't come to rest at all, according to the report of the one officer who continued to track the thing as it remained flying southward for a time, then arced to the west and finally returned the way it had come. He did

not watch the thing any further, in that his orders were to keep watch on the clock. Besides, whoever they were looking for surely would have to approach the tower from the ground. True, there had been some scuttlebutt at the station about bats, but hell! Was he supposed to report a squirrel, too?

He glanced down at his watch. Ten after twelve. Yawning, he accepted the fact that this was going to be an all-night stakeout. As with most stake-outs, it probably would be for nothing. Just another of those nights when nothing much was going to happen.

And nothing much did happen—not until fifteen minutes later. Even so, it was a full twenty blocks to the south. But those who ringed the children's zoo heard it begin. Then, with the sound of machine guns in the background, the radios in the unmarked cars jumped to frantic life.

'To the United Nations—and quick! *All hell is breaking loose down here!*'

The first to sense the trouble on the way was the large black she-cat which one moment lay curled up next to Cam's equipment and the next was on her sharp-clawed paws, hissing sharply.

Cam looked at her, at first not comprehending her message. Then he realized that, while he was facing north, Ktara was looking due south! Turning on his heel, he saw them.

High in the air, a small black cloud was moving up along the river—and down on a straight-arrow path toward the cluster of buildings which was the United Nations.

Then Ktara hissed again, this time looking to the west.

Where there was a second cloud, very much like the first.

'*They're here!*' Cam shouted, pointing toward both groups in succession. As his cry was taken up, he saw the third and fourth groups.

North, East, West and South—the four points of the compass.

And zeroing in.

Cam threw the switch on his master unit. Twenty needles jumped on their dials to indicate their levels of sound impulse output as he hefted the riflelike sender, then aimed it at the point of the eastern attack wing.

Nothing happened. Cam tensed, then relaxed. Too soon. They weren't within his effective range. When they were ...

When they were, it was the same.

Nothing was happening!

They're altered. It's as I said. Your device is useless.

Cam looked down at the bright green eyes of the cat and nodded grimly. The sender clattered to the rooftop, replaced in his hand by the .357 Magnum.

'Maybe this is less useless?'

Six shots, six bats. If, that is, your aim is perfect. How will you handle the seventh?

Cam had not time to consider the question as Navarre puffed up beside him. He pointed to the sound impulser.

'Use your weapon, boy!'

‘I’ve used it. No dice.’

Navarre sneered. ‘Then move into the central part of the roof. The flame shooters are taking the edges.’

Cam saw that it made sense as, already, the men in uniform were placing themselves. The flames—eight of them—were posted two to a direction, forming the outer ring of defense. The second ring consisted of the light-to-medium automatic weapons. There was no third ring, merely a cluster of men with radios and hand-weapons. This was the group which Cam joined as he looked upward.

The attack forces were getting closer. Now they no longer looked like cloud formations. Now one could make out the night-haze-space between groupings. And dimly through the night sounds of the city, one could hear the high-pitched cries of war.

From the top of the high Secretariat Building came a burst of machine gun fire. Premature, Cam said to himself. At the same time, he cocked back the hammer of his Magnum. The shrieks of the attackers were louder now.

It seemed only a matter of seconds before the air itself was shattered with them. The screams of the diving bats and the holocaust of answering bullets and flame!

From the beginning of the evening, Cam had concerned himself mainly with his own apparatus, not giving much thought at all to the logistics of defending a rooftop—several rooftops—from an attack by what now were obviously at least a couple of hundred relatively small beings. While his first reaction to the placement of the artillery components on this one roof was to approve it, he suddenly now saw a serious flaw in the entire system of defense.

Purely and simply, it was the problem of cross-fire.

As long as the creatures were on the outer parameters of the rough circle formed by the UN buildings there was no problem. But once they were allowed to get inside.

Each rooftop had to fend for itself. Help could come from no other for fear of hitting a secondary, human, target.

Bad. If the bats drove through the outermost defense, if they successfully got through to the UN grounds themselves—

And if all four groups concentrated their attack on just one area where they would far outnumber the humans—

And if, in addition, they came in low, so that the defenders’ shots would be hampered from cross-fire considerations—

Lord, if they did all those three things—

Instantly, Cam saw they were doing precisely those three things.

Low and swift, they all were converging on the easternmost of the three main buildings of the complex, the Conference Building. Lower than the other two, the roof was the largest in area, which should have meant more weapons. But as Cam rushed to the northeastern edge of his roof, he saw the Conference

Building contingent was sparse compared to theirs.

Navarre grabbed his sleeve. 'Where you going, boy!'

Cam shook off his hand. 'Don't be stupid. Get your flames over to the east side. At least knock out the northern group!'

Navarre looked from Cam to the four attack forces. Now he saw the point. 'I'll be damned! *Flames—to me, and hurry!*'

Then his own unit was on and lighting up the night air. Already the northernmost flamethrowers on the Conference Building roof were spitting fire in a swath of defense. Then the eastern and southern units flashed on, followed by flames from the west. From Cam's vantage point, the entire Conference Building looked like a three-alarm blaze and then some, as now from his own roof eight flame hurlers lashed their licking tongues of fire into the air between the two buildings.

'This'll fry their butts!' Navarre roared as he fed the flames.

Something—Cam didn't know what at the time, even though he was conscious of the black cat by his feet—made him turn around.

As if on cue the horde of bats—bats which had regrouped and circled to the west behind them—shrieked their defiance and descended to the kill.

Men whirled.

And screamed.

'*Flames out!*' Navarre bellowed.

'No!' Cam countered. 'Hold them high and cross!'

Racing across the roof himself, Cam stopped and brought his Magnum up with two hands. Joining what already was a chorus of automatic gunfire, the blast of the big gun caught one of the attackers square in the gullet. Wings and head flew to different points of the compass as the Puerto Rican squeezed off his second shot—a miss!

Then suddenly wings were beating all about his head. Fangs—or something sharp, some *things* sharp—dug in, scraped, cut, slashed. He dropped to one knee under the onslaught, then realized that he couldn't—wouldn't—give up that easily. Forcing himself to his feet again, he thrust the barrel of the Magnum flat against the side of his head, barrel upward, and jerked the trigger.

The roar deafened him to the hellish sounds about him. But his head was free from attack, his eyes clear.

Clear enough to see one bat-beclouded rifleman trip and stumble and disappear over the edge of the roof. Clear enough to see one man whose mouth motions indicated screaming, whose eyes were no longer within their bloody sockets. Clear enough to see that already the number of men who had been on the rooftop—who had been *alive* on the rooftop—was a third of what it had been.

'*Flamethrowers!*' he shouted, hoping someone, anyone, would hear him. Then, whipping his hand to firing position, he found his right hand no longer held the Magnum. The kick of the weapon, when he'd fired it—

And his right hand. Blood streaming down his palm, gashes torn in three fingers, and—*no weapon!*

With a crash of sound, the Niagara Falls that had been in his head receded to let in the savage shrieks of the killer bats and the agonized screams of the dying.

Another eyeless victim stumbling over the roof-edge, wailing a cry of pain that, mercifully perhaps, would be over in the few heartbeats it would take for his body to crash to the concrete below.

The bat-horde swarms were everywhere, relentlessly seeking fresh victims among the frantic firers of weapons.

Where were those flames?

One—just one—was operational. Some five yards from Cam, Detective Lieutenant Hank Navarre, looking as if he had seen his first ghost, was spraying the unit around and about himself in a protective circle. Protective, maybe, but too high. The damned thing looked like an airport searchlight. A beacon in the night, yes; but an effectively aimed weapon, no.

His arms whirling to fight off a renewed attack on his person, Cam crossed the five yards in a leaping bound. Planting his right foot squarely in the big cop's chest, he wrestled the still-flaming unit from the suddenly loosened grip. Not bothering with the niceties of seeing just where the lieutenant collided with the rooftop, Cam brought the flame down to the level where it would do the most good.

If his head had borne any hair, it would have been lost in the first close-on arc which singed his eyelashes and what felt like half of his face. His eyes stinging from the heat, it was all he could do to focus on the flying death-dealers above him. Gritting his teeth, he brought down a cluster of six, just leaving the mauled body of a plainclothesman. Then another three caught an intense fast blast which left them struggling skeletons, unable to stay aloft.

'All right, you bastards! Come get the hellfire you deserve!' he screamed.

And another four or five did. Then two more. Then—
Flameout!

For less than two heartbeats, a stillness as the bats—still an impressive horde—seemed to stay themselves, motionless in the air, all seeming to look down on this bullet-headed giant of a man as if deciding what to do about this human nuisance. Then one of their number—one larger than the others, wearing a red mark on its forehead—evidently decided. Moving its wings only slightly, it lifted itself high into the air. High, higher. Then with a long, high shriek and a body movement that resembled some kind of erotic spasm, it shot upward no more than two feet and, with what sounded like a bugle cavalry charge, it dipped one wing and shot downward.

Straight at Cam.

The whole horde joined him. At least, that's how it seemed to the Puerto Rican as he hacked and pulled them away from his face—as they hacked and slashed at that face, trying ...

Cam knew what they were trying. It was his eyes they were after. But if he was going down, he'd take one hell of a lot of them with—

And then suddenly he was hacking and clawing at thin air. Air which, just as suddenly, had ... well, *brightened*'.

Hhhssssssss.

The black cat was at his side, standing on its rear legs, pawing at the creatures hovering over his head. He stepped back. The bats remained where they were. Silent. Still. Reflecting in their own eyes a steady beam of white fire. From previous experience, Cam knew the source of that fire. He had seen it in the eyes of the cat before.

Then the fire paled. It was the bat with the red mark which again gave the signal cry.

And then the night was filled once more with flapping wings. Receding wings.

Cam was alone on the rooftops. Alone with the dead, the wounded, and the black cat.

'You—' he said. 'You ... you could have stopped them from the start.'

Quiet. Look to the east.

His eyes followed those of the cat. The horde of attacker bats was heading due north. To the east, however, from somewhere on Welfare Island in the East River, another winged creature was taking to the sky.

Such was the plan, he knew. But still—

'You could have stopped all this. All these men—dead!'

But all of them weren't. Including Cam, six men on the roof still were alive. Three were badly mutilated but, ironically, one of those who came through the night unscathed was Detective Lieutenant Hank Navarre.

As the heavy cop got to his feet, his eyes showed two emotions. One was the unwillingness to accept the death that lay everywhere about him. The second was directed solely toward the tall Puerto Rican.

And that was pure hatred...

Chapter Six

‘I can do something about those wounds, if you wish,’ Ktara said.

It was the first bit of conversation from either of them since Cam had directed the station wagon out of Manhattan and onto Long Island. As the car now sped east along the Long Island Expressway, Cam kept his eyes on the road ahead. He did not wish the elegant woman at his side to do anything at all for him. He did not wish to talk to her, to look at her.

‘You might try to understand,’ she said.

‘I understand enough,’ he replied. He ought to by now. Her Master had made the point often enough. What puny humans thought about right and wrong, good and evil, was none of his affair. He held his own thoughts about such matters. As he was himself what many people would consider to be the embodiment of Evil, that was understandable. There was no reason why his companion would think differently.

Except that he had thought she did. When they first had brought the Count here, both Harmon and himself would have fallen victim to the vampire had she not intervened. Again, she had saved his life during the San Francisco adventure. And tonight she had saved him.

Why?

Gratitude? Did she feel an obligation to Harmon and himself for their releasing her Master and thereby releasing her from her oncoming death by old age?

No, it could hardly be gratitude. That first night, within the crypt under Dracula’s mountain, the vampire had said it very concisely:

‘I offer you my gratitude,’ he said to them. ‘It is with some reluctance that I inform you that your blood will be the first to satisfy my hunger this night.’ He had laughed.

‘You think this wrong of me? Know, then, that all of those who in the past have pulled the stake from me have ended this way. I do not feel it especially dishonorable. After all, those who pull the stake do so because they wish something from me. I, in turn, wish something from them. It is in the nature of things that I prevail. Is that not simple?’

It had not been quite that simple. But, although Harmon’s science had prevailed, there was no changing the Count’s basic philosophy—nor the end that he intended for the professor and his assistant.

It therefore was hardly likely that Ktara would be motivated by gratitude. The odds were, it was nothing more than whim. That had been her explanation that first time:

‘You seek an explanation. Let it be this. When it is possible I do as it pleases me. Perhaps tonight it pleased me to allow you to live. Tomorrow night or some night in the future, something other than this may please me.’

Again, tonight, it had pleased her for Cam to live. Him. As for all those

others—

He winced, as much from the memory as from the pain from his head wounds.

‘You really should have done something about those,’ the woman said. ‘If you won’t let me—’

His dark eyes glared momentarily into hers. ‘I’ll tell you what, ma’am. As soon as we get to Westhampton, I promise I’ll pour a little salt into each of them.’

The woman’s nostrils flared. ‘If you could, for just a moment, be as objective as you supposedly were trained to be!’

‘Sure. Just like all those men on the roof. They received the same kind of training in objectivity as I did. Really did them a hell of a lot of good, didn’t it?’

Lord, how many of them were there? He hadn’t waited to hear the count. Under Navarre’s hate-filled stare, he’d simply picked up his Magnum and something else and gone down to the ground level and to the station wagon. His electronic equipment and the cat he’d left behind him, but Ktara was in the front seat of the vehicle when he eased behind the wheel. She had just made contact with Harmon on the communicator.

‘Is Cam there?’ the professor’s voice asked.

She extended the speaker to the Puerto Rican.

‘Cam?’ Harmon said.

‘Yes, sir,’ he said wearily.

‘Well, tell me, how did things go?’

‘Bad.’

The professor waited for Cam to say more. When he didn’t, he said slowly, ‘Cam ... are you all right? You sound terrible.’

‘*I feel* terrible,’ Cam replied.

‘You look terrible,’ was Harmon’s greeting as Cam entered the Westhampton study.

Without a word, the younger man dropped two things on the professor’s desk. As the antique clock over the blazing fireplace announced with chimes that the time was three-thirty in the morning, he poured himself a water tumbler full of expensive cognac.

He downed a third of it before he slumped into a wingback chair close to the fire. The woman, he noticed, sat across the room, closer to Harmon.

The professor’s eyes, however, were on neither of them. He had wheeled his chair to the desk and was busily examining what Cam had dropped there.

Not the Magnum. The dead bat.

‘It’s an odd-looking one,’ he said, speculatively.

Ktara nodded. ‘It should be. It’s a clever mixture. The two prime components are the *Pteropidae*, or the *flying foxes* as they are called, from which it gets its ability to see in light and its large size, and the *Desmodontidae*, your so-called vampire bat, from which it gets its head

structure. There are three other strains which have lesser effects, mainly to increase the animal's intelligence level.'

Hannon spread the wings. From tip to tip the span was slightly more than six feet. Then his attention was caught by the 'thumbs' of the creature.

'Cam—they're sheathed with metal. With a sharp—' He jerked his finger back. Simply inspecting the weapon had drawn blood.

'Good Lord, a beast like this could—'

'Did,' Cam interrupted.

Harmon turned, nodded. If he noticed the way Cam was glaring at Ktara, he chose to ignore it.

'Yes. Sandy called with a full count. Evidently you didn't stay long enough to hear it—at least, that's what he said. Are you interested?'

Cam smiled grimly, his eyes still on Ktara. 'Sure. We'd both like to hear the final tally.'

'Thirty-six dead, another ten injured, four of them seriously.'

'It's a wonder I made it,' Cam said.

Harmon's face was grim. 'You say that with sarcasm, Cam—why? And why did I get the impression that Sandy Proctor felt uneasy about telling me you made it out unscathed?'

Cam held out his arms. 'You call this unscathed?' he said quietly. 'As for your primary question, you'd best direct that toward our lady friend. If she hadn't intervened when she had, the statistics you just recited would have been a little heavier.'

His pitch had begun to rise, then it dropped back to almost a whisper. He could not hide the pain on his face.

'Cam—should a doctor be called?'

Ktara laughed. 'He does not require a doctor. Look for yourself. I cure his ailments.'

She had not moved, not a finger, seemingly not even a flicker of an eye, but the pain was gone from Cam. As he looked at his hands, he saw that gone too were the cuts. There were no scars to show they had ever been.

'You were *not asked to*—'

'Consider it—whim.' Her voice was like ice. 'Yes. That is why I saved your fife, is it not? Whim? Is that not what went through your mind during our drive to this place? Whim, yes. It amused me to have your body whole again so that Professor Harmon can tell you what *else* Mr. Sanford Proctor told him regarding yourself!'

The professor's eyebrows rose. So did Cam's. The plate Harmon wore cupped around his brain's frontal lobes had acted, in the past at least, to prevent her reading his thoughts. And now, suddenly—

'No,' she said. 'I do not know what it is you have to say to Mr. Sanchez. Only that Mr. Sanford Proctor had something else to communicate to you. The thought was very strong in your head, Professor. And even if it were not, the thoughts of Detective Lieutenant Navarre were very easy to read earlier

tonight.'

'Navarre,' Cam repeated.

'Navarre,' Harmon said. 'He tells an interesting story about what happened up on that rooftop tonight. It seems you were the first to see the attack force coming. It then seems that you discovered the precise attack plan—that the bats were zeroing in on just one of the buildings, the Conference Building to the east of you; and, further, that it was your strategy that moved the General Assembly Building's force to cover the Conference roof.'

Cam nodded. 'All of which is correct.'

'And laudable. Except for the fact that the attack everybody was defending against didn't take place—and that thirty-six men were killed on the roof which the force did attack, from its undefended rear.'

Cam scowled. 'It was a feint from the start,' he said.

'That's not Navarre's interpretation, Cam. He is claiming that you set them up.'

'I did *what*?'

'Diverted the attention of everyone around you onto the other rooftop, so that Navarre and his men were taken completely off guard.'

'That's ridiculous.'

'So I told Sandy, but Navarre cited some additional items.'

'Namely?'

'One—that you had everyone's hopes built up on your sound sender, which got them in the mood that the task ahead would be easy. Two—after the attack, you called all the flamethrowers to yourself in the middle of the roof, where they would be least effective. Three—when you saw that there was only one unit operational, you assaulted the officer handling it and took it from him, immediately extinguishing the flame.'

'One,' Cam said, 'I had some hopes in that sound sender myself. Two, I called the flamethrowers to me because they were useless where they were. Three, the officer was Navarre and he was handling the thing like a fishing pole *and* wasting so much of the fuel that it sputtered out seconds after I had it.'

Harmon raised his hand. 'I believe you, Cam. The problem is, Navarre is getting a warrant on you. For questioning. It will only be a matter of time before he traces you to this place.'

'Proctor will tell him?'

'Sandy will do what he has to do.'

'Then what do you suggest?'

. 'I suggest that this business be cleared up as soon as possible. Hopefully, the Count—'

A bleeping sound began to come from the portable tracer unit on Harmon's desk.

'Speak of the devil,' he said. 'No pun intended.' He checked the reading. 'He's been stationary for the past two hours—somewhere north of Ossining.'

Now he's moving again.'

'Which way? Cam asked.

'This way,' Harmon replied.

Count Dracula's voice was a mixture of admiration and venom.

'They have been trained well, these creatures which are mixtures of several creatures. They receive no commands other than from their leader, the largest of them all. Other than that they are completely—your word for it is *programmed*. They split into four groups after leaving the central city. While each group headed north, I had to choose which I would follow. I chose the one led by the leader of all of them. And when they came to rest, I rested with them. But this was not by any means their final destination—a thickly wooded forest. They were programmed to remain there for a certain duration of time.'

'And you didn't wait?' Cam asked.

Dracula sneered. 'No.'

'You should know why,' Ktara said. 'The dawn hour must find my Master resting on the soil of his homeland.'

'We understand,' Harmon said. 'Count, you say that no one could command them other than their leader. Yet, earlier tonight Ktara managed to —'

'To block their movement,' the vampire completed. 'Yes, that was possible for me to do as well. But nothing further. It was movement we desired, was it not? I tried to force such movement. With unwelcome results. Two of their kind are now dead because of my attempt, their brains burnt to ashes. This disturbs me, Harmon. As you know I agreed to do this thing for you with the stipulation that I should not have to kill my little brothers—even such brothers as these.'

Cam stood. 'Even such as these—though they killed more than thirty men tonight.'

Dracula shrugged. 'That is no concern of mine.'

'I forgot,' Cam responded. 'I forgot that we humans are insignificant to you and your cat-friend.'

The vampire's eyebrows rose as he turned toward Ktara. There was a silence in which Harmon and Cam knew she was communicating mentally to her Master. The Master smiled. He looked as if he were about to say something, then thought better of it. At least he changed his mind as to the content of what he said:

'You know, Harmon, as I was returning, I felt the pangs of hunger through my body.' His eyes began to glow. There was just a suggestion of his eyeteeth lengthening. 'Ah! But a word pledged is a word kept. Very sad, especially when I saw so many likely candidates below me during my flight. And when I think of the dead on that rooftop, the dead whose life's blood was allowed simply to—*ah!*' He shook his head and turned to Ktara.

'Come, my sweet. Come with me below and bring to me that foul synthetic so that I may feed.'

The ring of the telephone was cut off at the second tone.

‘Yes,’ Harmon said into it. Then he listened as the short one-sided conversation ran to its end. Hanging up, he looked at the three others in the room in turn.

‘It was Sandy Proctor. The mayor has received a call just now. The same million is to be at the same place at the same time—tonight.’

Ktara’s eyes flashed. ‘*Is to be?*’ This is the demand, but will your officials do as he asks this time? Or will there be more bloodshed?’

Harmon’s voice was stern. ‘The money will be there. But, even so, there *will* be more bloodshed. That I promise you.’ His eyes rested on those of Dracula.

The vampire smiled. ‘In that case, Professor, I shall delay my feeding.’

Chapter Seven

‘Good morning to you, Brother,’ Adrian Abelard said cheerfully.

Entering the kitchen of the old house on the hilltop, August Abelard, his white laboratory coat spotless, scowled at his brother.

‘For one up so early to greet the newborn day, it seems to me you could afford a change of clothing, perhaps even a touch of water and soap to your body.’

‘Oh? And were we expecting the Queen of England this morning? Or is it merely the Prince of Wales you would have me bedeck myself specially for?’

‘We are expecting no one. It is another day of work as usual. For me, that is.’

Adrian filled a coffee mug and passed it to his brother. ‘And for me? Is there any special reason I should not look like the bum you think me?’

‘You could be of assistance, you know.’

Adrian smiled. ‘With the bats, you mean?’

‘Yes, with the bats. Is there anything wrong with working with the bats?’

‘Nothing, I should guess. Not from your viewpoint. As for me—’

The coffee mug smashed to the tabletop. ‘As for you, Adrian, I just now have made up my mind. Now that we are so close to winning our way in the world, you either will assist me in my work or—’

‘Or I shall have no pie. Or bread, I believe the story goes.’

‘Pie? Bread? Who was speaking of—’

‘The Little Red Hen. And it was bread, yes. She asked all of her animal friends—I don’t think there was a bat among them—if they would help her during the various stages of making her bread. They all refused, but when she asked them who would help her *consume* the final product, ah! they all were quite willing. The parallel with our case, Brother August, is—’

‘Ts clear enough. Therefore, since you seem to have grasped the essentials of my position, what is your response?’

Adrian considered. ‘The problem, you see, is that of the final product. In the story the Little Red Hen did in fact come up with the bread. If she had not, all of the other souls from whom she requested an investment in time and effort would have had the last laugh.’

August’s eyes narrowed. ‘I warn you, Adrian, if you do not make this—this investment, as you call it—I shall leave you flat. Then what shall become of you? I want your answer right now, this very minute.’

‘You say that the end product is near?’

‘Very near.’

‘What exactly will I be expected to do?’

‘Whatever I tell you to do. The first thing I’m telling you to do is take a bath and change into some clean clothing.’ He paused. ‘Well, what is your answer?’

Adrian Abelard shrugged. 'Await me here, I take myself hence to the tub,' he said dramatically. He moved to the doorway, then turned. 'Which is to say, dear Brother, that I accept your proposition. Hopefully, the relevance of the Little Red Hen adventure will apply to our situation, although the disturbing element remains.'

'Disturbing element? And what is that?'

'The bats. I'm certain now. There was not even a single one among the entire brood.'

August was on his second cup of coffee when his brother returned with a good-natured greeting:

'Hail, fellow scientist. Are we now ready to descend to the depths?'

It had taken Adrian less than half an hour, but the results were remarkable. He had completely transformed himself from what indeed had been an unkempt bum into—

'Why, you're *me*. With that laboratory coat and a clean face...'

'The hair still is a little long, but then that's supposed to be the style these days. Or have the styles changed since we've been in exile up here in the mountains?'

August Abelard laughed. 'I should know? But it's amazing—how you look so much like me!'

'We are twins, after all, Brother?'

'I know, but it's been so long—'

'Since I've had a bath? I quite agree. But if I'm going to live in luxury, I might as well get used to it beforehand, yes?'

'Of course... of course.'

Something in his brother's tone attracted Adrian's attention. 'What is it you're thinking now?'

August shook his head. 'Nothing. Nothing really. I was just considering now—well, the fact that it is almost impossible to tell us apart. I was wondering how me might use that to our advantage.'

'There is a way I've thought of. If—after you get your scientific acclaim, of course—we wanted to go into the entertainment field ... you know, Abelard the Great and His Magic Bats ... well, we could pull a real sensational disappearance and reappearance act. As long as no one was wise to the fact that there were two of us—'

'A magic act?'

'It's only a thought.'

'In which case I'll treat it as only that, Adrian.'

'There's money in show business, Brother.'

'There's money elsewhere, Brother, easier to get.' August's eyes grew hard. 'Now, let us go about our work.'

They left the house by the kitchen door and walked the hundred yards to the cave entrance. Barely large enough for a man to enter, the gap in the rock was well hidden from uninitiated eyes by two boulders and a quantity of

thorny brush. Even should someone find the entrance, he still would find it difficult to discern the way to the large vaults below. Nature had sent the first part of the interior off in two directions, but the brothers Abelard had done a craftsman like job of making it appear that one of these channels ended in a blunt stone wall.

It was this wall they now approached, their flashlights on. August's right palm put pressure to a particular place on one side of the wall. It moved on well-oiled hinges to let them pass. Simple, really. Thick plywood, faced with a rough epoxy which in the light of a lamp or flashlight, closely resembled the inner cave rock.

On the other side of the door the passageway declined, sharply. The two brothers moved downward; then, guided by their lights, took the several twists and turns that brought them finally into the first of several large cave-rooms under the hill.

August crossed to the carnival table and lit the three lanterns. 'An eerie place, is it not, Brother?'

'It is, Brother. It is a place of demons.'

'To be sure. But they are talented little demons,' August said. Opening a drawer under the table top he extracted a thin silver tube, similar to the one he held in his hand. 'Here, Adrian—this is to be your command device. Do not try it this morning. I'll instruct you in its use later in the day.'

^x Adrian looked at the whistle given him, then placed it in a side pocket of the laboratory coat. 'Well, where do we begin? Do we have our little performers jump through hoops or walk the tightrope?'

August's eyes brightened. 'Neither. Today we practice a very special trick, one which we've worked on before—which you would have known had you taken an interest. You see, most of the things my little friends have been taught to do are *individual* tricks, or feats which merely require them to follow their leader. This exercise demands a certain amount of group cooperation. Real cooperation, Adrian. Something the fools who call themselves scientists would say could not be taught to such as these. Come. We must go into the room beyond. It is more suited to our purpose.'

The passageway to the next 'room' was short. Each of the brothers had brought with him one of the kerosene lanterns from the table and August directed that they be placed near the center of the floor. As their light spread throughout the cavern, he viewed the scene with delight.

Close to one wall were a number of cardboard boxes. Of different sizes, they were arranged in a configuration that suggested a city skyline. One group of four cartons resembled nothing so much as the United Nations complex. On the top of that box, which was in the position of the General Assembly Building, there was a dark stain. A stain which looked like dried blood.

Adrian inspected the scene with a wary interest. 'And what is the purpose of all these boxes, Brother?'

August beamed. 'Navigational exercises. The idea was to train my friends

to roost on one perch while disregarding the others.'

'And was the exercise a success?'

A sharp laugh. 'All the exercises have been successful, Adrian. All of them. Now, if you will kindly move all the boxes to the side—we shan't need but one of them for this next routine.'

Adrian followed his brother's instructions. When there was but one box left, he turned to see August lift the silver whistle to his mouth.

The scientist's eyes widened with near-insanity as the sound of flapping wings filled the cavern. He beamed with pleasure as the sound stopped. There were but a dozen or so of the large bats resting on the boxes near the wall. The greatest concentration of them was on that one box. The one with the bloodstain. Directly above that dark stain was the largest of the creatures, the one with the red mark on its head.

'You will find some netting along the wall there,' August said. 'Bring it to the center of the floor, if you will. I—'

His speech stopped dead as he crossed to where the bats waited.

'Is something wrong?' Adrian asked.

'Their fur ... their wings, too ... they appear to be torn up.'

Adrian crossed to the boxes. 'Looks like they've been doing a bit of scrapping. They are not the most docile of creatures, as you well know.'

'But they have been trained not to fight among themselves! I wonder if... last night...'

'Last night, Brother?'

August's eyes averted those of Adrian's. 'Er, yes. At night they are allowed to ... to feed themselves. I wonder if ...'

He began to count the number of bats on the tops of the cartons. 'Thirteen.'

'An unlucky number,' Adrian observed.

'Perhaps,' August said slowly. 'The signal from my whistle was supposed to draw fifteen of my creatures to me.' Again the whistle moved to the scientist-brother's lips. No flapping wings answered the call.

August's face was a portrait of discomfort. 'Two did not return to the caves. This is not good, Adrian. Not good at all. If they have fallen into the hands of someone who might recognize them for what they are—'

'Your work will be disclosed prematurely,' Adrian completed.

August looked at his brother as if he hadn't heard him. Adrian repeated himself.

'Er, yes. That would be a very serious consequence. We ...'

And now the features of August Abelard's face distended into those which his brother knew well. The madness was overtaking him again. It would last for an hour—maybe two or more. It was a strange malady, one which made Adrian uneasy, but one which had never been attended with violence. It was more of a thing where his brother's mind would be channeled into one train of thought, a single focus from which it could not be moved or jolted.

The wild eyes moved from the winged creatures to the eyes of Adrian.

‘Come, Brother. We must hurry. Bring the nets. There is so little time before ...’

‘Before we collect our riches, Brother?’

‘Yes,’ August replied with a leering stare. ‘Yes, yes—yes.’

Shortly after ten in the morning there was a visitor to the Westhampton manor. He had been seen getting out of his car, thus it was that the door was answered by Professor Harmon himself, his wheelchair a formidable blockade to passage into the interior of the hall.

‘You are Damien Harmon?’ the stocky man asked.

‘I am. And you are Detective Lieutenant Navarre. To what do I owe this call?’

‘I’m not calling on you, Professor. I have a warrant for Cameron Sanchez. For questioning in connection with murder.’

‘That will be of interest to Mr. Sanchez. I shall be sure to inform him when I see him.’

‘I have reason to believe he is inside this house right now.’

Harmon shrugged his huge shoulders. ‘I have no reason to dispute any of your beliefs, Lieutenant. But I must say that it’s rather chilly out this morning, and I’d just as soon the door be closed. Once these old houses get cold, it’s the very devil of a time we have warming them up again.’

‘I was told you were cooperative, Professor.’

‘And I am. I try to stay within the law in all my actions.’

‘But one of your actions will not be to move your chair aside so that I can find Sanchez.’

‘Correct. Unless, of course, you have a search warrant in addition to your other papers.’

Navarre’s face tensed. ‘It won’t be hard to get one.’

‘I don’t doubt that in the least. But certainly doing so will take time. I wonder about your use of time, Lieutenant. It was my understanding that you were working on this—this bat thing.’

‘I am, Professor Harmon. I am?’

‘Then I suggest you report in to update yourself on the latest developments. Tonight just may be your last opportunity to settle the matter. Goodbye, Lieutenant.’

The heavy door swung closed.

The big plainclothesman scowled at the paneled oak, then walked to his automobile. As he turned the ignition and eased the car out of the unpaved drive, his scowl deepened. Yes, he knew the latest developments, as Harmon called them. They were going to shell out the million bucks. He’d found that out a couple of hours ago. It had been a sleepless night—if anyone in fact could sleep after that experience on the United Nations rooftop. Even so, it was four in the morning before he could get back to the files he wanted to check. Cameron Sanchez. Very little on the man. It was as if he’d fallen into a hole and disappeared for the past three years, except for uncorroborated notes

that he might have been involved in a couple of gangland shootouts in Brooklyn and Queens. As for Damien Hannon, there wasn't much more. There was one note, however, that caught Navarre's attention. Earlier this year the Frank Anthony mob had been almost totally wiped out. Officially it was on the books as another war between rival gangs, but there were some strange aspects to the case. It was known that the Anthony organization was deeply involved in an airport and ship terminal operation. They stole goods, then ransomed them back to their addresses. Very choosy they were in what they took, very sophisticated for this kind of business.

However, it also was known that one of their intended victims was Damien Harmon. One of their *last* intended victims before the wipe-out. That was interesting. As was another fact, expressed in the newspaper clipping Navarre found in the file. The headline summed it up well:

ANTHONY MOB LIEUTENANT CLAIMS BOSS SPOKE OF VAMPIRES ON NIGHT OF DEATH Vampires. Vampire bats. Harmon and Sanchez. The mesh was obvious to anyone who looked for it. And there was another thing:

Old Sanford Proctor. When he was called into the bat case, one of the first things he did was to call in Harmon and Sanchez. Why? The old man had been around a long time—doing exactly what, Navarre wasn't sure. But he had one whale of a lot of clout downtown, there was no doubt about that, no doubt at all. If Harmon and Proctor were as tight as the evidence showed, then the old man might well know Harmon could be of particular help in this specific case. It stood to reason.

But the fact was that Proctor was an old man, and old men don't always think too clearly. Sanford Proctor might make the connection between Harmon and vampire bats, but it might not be the *right* connection. And what better position for Harmon to be in than to have his own right-hand man smack on the scene to make sure things went the way they wanted them?

The unmarked police car slowed to a stop as Navarre reached over and opened the right front door. When the door had closed, the car moved off.

'Done?' Navarre asked the lean man who was now his passenger.

'Done. There are two vehicles in the garage, a big Cadillac and the station wagon. Both of them are wearing little bugs now.'

'What's the matter, Doane? You look kind of strange.'

The thin man named Doane nodded. 'It's weird, but this place makes me nervous. Back around the house and the garage there, it's like the sun never gets in through all those trees. I mean, here it is a bright fall morning, and yet in there it was cold and, well, sort of clammy. Like—'

Navarre knew what the man meant. He had felt it too.

'Like a crypt,' he completed.

Chapter Eight

At six-thirty, Detective Lieutenant Hank Navarre was one of twenty police officials shown into a Manhattan conference room. As the men took their seats, he noted with disapproval that one of those in the Big Three chairs at the head of the long table was Sanford Proctor. Proctor, however, did none of the talking, not initially. That was reserved to a man named Stein, a special assistant to the commissioner.

The lecture was complete with maps on easels. There were two of them, the first a detailed schematic of the United Nations area.

‘We’re taking no chances,’ Stein began. ‘This whole area will be cordoned off just like last night. This time we’ll have twelve flamethrowers to a rooftop. According to last night’s experience, they seemed to be the most effective weapon we had. Do you agree, Lieutenant Navarre?’

‘When they were used, yes.’ He looked straight at Proctor, who in turn appeared to ignore the stare.

‘All right, then. Additionally, we’ll have flames at ground level here ... here ... and here,’ he pointed to three locations between East Forty-Eighth and Forty-Second Streets. ‘Units to be assigned have been designated. Designations will be covered in a moment. As to right now, are there any questions?’

A uniformed captain normally assigned to West Side duty had one:

‘Why concentrate on the UN? You said you’re giving the guy the money.’

‘That’s correct. But we have no way of knowing whether or not our man may wish to provide us with another of his demonstrations. Another question?’

‘Yes,’ replied a media relations officer. ‘The press. They’re bugging the hell out of us. It’s no secret that *something* happened at the UN last night. I don’t think we can hold them off for long—not with tonight’s sealing-off of the area.’

‘The mayor personally has spoken to the newspaper publishers and the heads of the radio and television networks. The news blackout has been complete so far.’

‘So far,’ the media officer repeated. ‘I’m just concerned about what will happen if something slips.’

‘So are we,’ Stein assured him. ‘So are we. Any other questions?’

Navarre nodded. ‘The park. What happens there?’

‘I was getting to that, Lieutenant. First, are there any other questions regarding UN security?’

There were none. Stein moved to the second map-board, which detailed Central Park from Seventy-Fifth to Fifty-Ninth. Around the area abutting Fifth Avenue at East Sixty-Fourth was a red grease-penciled circle.

‘I’ll run through this briefly, since none of you will be involved. Right here

is the clock. At the top of it, tonight at eleven-thirty, ten parcels each containing one hundred thousand dollars will be placed there. That's about it.'

'About it?' Navarre repeated. 'What about the stake-out.'

'What stake-out is that, Lieutenant? We are planning none.'

'Mr. Stein, are you saying you're just going to put that money up there—and then leave it unguarded?'

'Not exactly, Lieutenant, but Mr. X—our master of bats—was quite explicit regarding his wishes. No police, he said. None. We are complying.'

'But—but how do we catch the man? How—'

'Lieutenant Navarre,' the commissioner broke in. 'Your concern is shared by all of us. Mr. Stein did not say that no one would be watching that clock. He merely said that *we*, the police, would not have a stake-out there.'

The uniformed captain of the West Side precinct spoke up. 'Might we ask who *will* be there, sir?'

The commissioner nodded thoughtfully. 'That portion of tonight's operation is being coordinated by Mr. Proctor. I believe he is known to most of you gentlemen. Sandy, is there anything you can tell us?'

Sanford Proctor cleared his throat.

'Not very much. There's really not very much to tell. There will be one man watching the area, and he will attempt to follow whoever picks up the money.'

'Can you tell us who this man is?'

Proctor looked at the mayor's aide who asked the question. 'No. For the time being, that must remain my business.'

Yours and mine, Navarre thought to himself. For, as Proctor's eyes scanned the room, they momentarily locked onto those of the big detective. There was no doubt at all as to who that single watcher would be.

At eleven-thirty, Cam Sanchez climbed down the side of the children's zoo clock. The ten parcels which looked like somebody's laundry were in place, their edges visible from below. In the near-full moonlight, he would be able to see them clearly from the place where he would be waiting.

As he walked along the pavement leading to the exit, his black jacket and slacks melting into the darkness of the park, he wondered who else might be watching.

Mr. X? Maybe, maybe not.

The police? Maybe, maybe not. The orders were firm: stay clear of the east side of the park; but there was at least one cop who might be willing to disobey those orders. Hopefully, however, Navarre had been boxed in.

'He didn't like it at all,' Proctor had said over the telephone. 'But there wasn't much he could do, short of resigning right there and then. When Stein told him he was once again in command of the General Assembly roof, his face turned as red as blood.'

'Which is exactly what he's out for,' Cam had commented.

Reaching the Fifth Avenue sidewalk, Cam looked at the rows of parked

cars. No, Navarre wouldn't be in any of them. But there were other possibilities. Navarre had a lot of enemies on the force, maybe, but he had some good friends, too. A couple of off-duty cops in an unmarked car would be easy for him to arrange.

Well, anyone who was watching him had better be quick. Never mind anyone else. If he wanted to be sure of seeing the action, *he* had better be quick.

He crossed Fifth Avenue at a trot and headed east on the south sidewalk of East Sixty-Fourth. He didn't head that way long. A quick right took him between two buildings—and the fire escape ladder of one of them. It was an easy jump for the tall Puerto Rican to the bottom rung. Hand-over-hand, he swung his body upward until his feet had purchase on the lower rungs, then it was fast work to the top of the wall. Over the edge, onto the roof and across to the Fifth Avenue side.

The high-powered field glasses were where he'd left them, beneath a newspaper. Propping his elbows on the edge of the roof, he snapped the glasses to his eyes. They had been prefocused. The unobstructed clock tower was in perfect sharpness. As were the ten parcels of money.

Eleven-forty. And waiting. Cam began arcing the binoculars to the surrounding area, but always coming back to the top of the clock. Nothing. Nothing but stillness.

Eleven-forty-five. Eleven-fifty. Still waiting.

Midnight.

And nothing.

Twelve-five.

And the beating of wings. A single pair—coming from directly behind him!

The .357 Magnum was cocked before Cam completed his turn. But where he had expected to see a vampire bat, there was none.

No longer, at any rate.

'Your observation post serves its purpose well,' Count Dracula said thickly.

He stood five yards from Cam, his cloak wrapped tightly about his huge frame, the moonlight reflecting the paleness of his face and the bright whiteness of his elongated teeth. The red coals of his eyes looked contemptuously at the pistol still pointing toward him.

'Put away your toy, Mr. Sanchez. The time when you shall have to try to defend yourself from me has not yet come. Instead, may I suggest that you return your attention to the scene across the street. I believe my little brothers are nearing their target.'

Cam reached into his jacket and brought out the small communicator. 'You heard that?' he asked.

'I heard,' Harmon's voice replied.

The Count sneered. 'Then hear this as well, Professor Harmon. One day

your communication devices will fail, as will the control device by which you hold me. On that day you and your friend are as dead men. This I promise you. In the meantime—'

'In the meantime,' Harmon interrupted, 'you will keep the word already given us. Cam—what's happening at the clock?'

The Puerto Rican already had his glasses in position. 'Nothing. Nothing at all—wait!'

He saw it then. Not at the clock proper, but northward as he swept the binoculars in a wide arc. A single flying object against the sky. A large object, its wing-span and mode of movement leaving no uncertainty as to its nature. It was one of the large bats. Alone.

It flew in a direct line to the top of the clock and came to rest for no more than three to four of Cam's heartbeats. Then it rose again into the air, heading back the way it had come.

According to Cam's watch, it was not thirteen minutes after midnight.

Cam reported to Harmon on what he'd seen. 'That's it. The money's still there.'

'What does the Count think?' Harmon asked.

Cam turned. He was alone on the roof. He was about to communicate this fact to the professor when a sound from the park brought his eyes back to the clock. Not sound. Sounds.

The high-pitched calls of the killer bats!

They flew with a precision common to Air Force stunt teams, moving around the top of the clock in what looked like an unbroken circle. They flew in pairs, with something dangling between each pair. It was only when the gathering of the parcels began that Cam recognized those somethings for what they were.

Now he saw that not all of the creatures carried the somethings. Some five—no, six—of them flew downward, coming to rest on the top of the money packages. Then, one by one, each pair of bats moved to a position just below the top of the clock. At which point—

Those on the rim of the clock edged one parcel at a time over the side—placing it directly in the middle of the netting offered by each pair.

One pair flew off, then a second, then a third. Ten packages, ten pairs of carriers, their great wings beating in tandem on their northbound flight.

Then silence.

It was twelve-twenty. The top of the clock was clean. To the north, the last of the flying gatherers disappeared over the trees. All of the huge bats were gone from sight.

Except for the one which now rose up directly behind the clock. Slightly larger than the others, moving through the night air at a slightly swifter pace, the creature which had flown under countless moons for untold generations followed in the wake of his 'little brothers'.

Leaving the darkness of the alleyway under the fire escape, Cam headed

east along Sixty-Fourth. At that street's intersection with Madison Avenue, he sighted a taxi and hailed it.

'Seventy-Ninth. Between York and First,' he said, climbing in.

As the cab began moving again, Cam checked all directions. If anybody was following him, they were good.

So was the driver's time in making the trip. Cam tipped him an extra dollar as he stepped out onto the dark street. As the taxi moved off, Cam walked east the length of two apartment buildings, then leaned against a railing. Satisfied that no one was now tailing him, he reversed directions.

He crossed First Avenue, then Second. His car was waiting for him in a garage between Second and Third.

'All clean, sir,' the attendant said. Cam did not miss the respectful tone. He also knew it had nothing to do with his size. It was the car. The black Cadillac limo. Their 'mobster car' is what Jenny Harmon, the professor's niece who now was studying at Berkeley, called it.

'How very ostentatious!' she had chided her uncle. 'Conspicuous consumption worthy of the newly moneyed, but not of you, Uncle Damien.'

But Jenny could not understand that Harmon had bought the car simply because it was *not* conspicuous. Not, at least, when parked among others just like it—for example, at gangland funerals. Those, Cam reflected briefly, had been the good old days. *Old* days? He was thinking as if they had been centuries ago. But then maybe in one way his thinking was right. It seemed somehow that he himself had gotten a lot older since that night when the regal old woman rang their Manhattan doorbell and sealed his future—and Harmon's—with that of beings who walked the earth when the fabled continent of Atlantis flaunted its greatness before the mass of humanity which still lived in caves.

'I cleaned it real good,' the attendant said.

'Yeah, real good,' Cam replied, starting the big engine. It could be that the man was just playing the odds, a scared little guy trying to earn an honest buck and not get the mob burned off at him unnecessarily. But Cam made a mental note to add the address to their list of possible mobster-controlled businesses.

Yeah, the good old days.

Two a.m. The Cadillac sat in the parking lot of an all-night diner just outside Tarrytown. Behind the wheel sat Cam Sanchez, sipping the final dregs in his paper coffee cup. Tarrytown was the natural spot to halt in the chase. That was where a convenient bridge went across the Hudson River. Plus the fact it was south of Ossining, which had been the stopping place the previous night.

It was the stopping place this night as well. The tracking unit confirmed it. He had transferred the unit to the limousine from the station wagon. Of the two vehicles, Cam preferred the wagon, primarily because he had worked on the motor himself. The Cadillac motor hadn't needed much in the way of

boost. But if Navarre or his friends were watching, they would associate the wagon with Cam, not necessarily the Cadillac.

There were two white blips on the green glass circle. Close together. One was the Count. The second was from the tiny transmitter in one of the money sacks. The police had been refused permission to bug the money. Proctor had stood firm on it, knowing full well that a special miniature unit was going to be in place.

Proctor. He would do what he had to do, Harmon had said. Evidently that included leveling with Navarre as to his current residence. Cam had been upstairs at the time Navarre's car swung into the drive. Harmon had told him to stay put, that he would handle things. He had, and afterward he also had defended the big cop.

'He's doing his job the way he sees it, Cam.'

'Sure. By trying to pin a murder rap on one of our favorite Latin American citizens!'

'There will be no formal charge. All we have to do is find the guilty party.'

Cam had grinned in spite of himself. 'Professor, do you recall the night, just two nights ago, it was, that your friend Proctor came calling on us? He was in a bit of a spot, he said. The city was in a bit of a spot. And would we help? he wanted to know. Now, just two days later, it's not Proctor we're helping, but Sanchez we're trying to get off the hook. Off the murder hook.'

Harmon had answered grin with grin. 'In which case, Cameron, I trust you will give it your all.'

Myall.

Two-thirty.

Blip blip blip.

And blip blip blip.

Another cup of coffee?

Cam scowled. Not yet. If nothing happens by three ... Three. He went inside to get another cup.

Three-thirty. Blip blip blip and blip blip blip.

Four. Blip blip—

Movement! One of the senders was—

Moving southeast. The Count was coming back in.

But it would do no harm to check. The larger tracker at the Westhampton manor could distinguish between the senders. Cam punched his communicator.

'Yes,' a feminine voice responded. 'It is my Master.'

'He's been very helpful,' Cam said sarcastically,

'I beg your—'

Cam cut her off. The hell with her. He had thought she was somehow different from the fiend she called Master. But there were thirty-six men she could have saved but didn't. His grandmother, steeped in Church philosophy, had the term for it. Sin by omission. Failure to act, to do the thing that was

right, Ktara—

The bitch.

The four-thousand-year-old mind-reading vampire-loving feline bitch!

Four-thirty. Blip blip blip in Ossining. And out on Long Island another, useless, blip blip blip.

Five. Only one signal now, the one in Ossining.

Five-thirty.

Five-thirty-three.

Cam's eyes focused in on the green glass. Blip blip blip, yes. But moving? He shook his head, then allowed the yawn that was coming anyway to have full sway. His eyes were clear now.

And the blipping white dot *was* moving!

Chapter Nine

It was almost noon, the sun bouncing off the hood of the big Cadillac as Cam swung the machine off Route 17 and onto 209. One hour more, maybe two, and he'd be there, somewhere near the upstate New York community of Woodbourne. For what seemed the thousandth time he rechecked the map coordinates with the signal on his screen.

The blip still was there, stationary.

His selection of Tarrytown as a wait-out spot had paid off. From Ossining, which also was on the east bank of the Hudson, the signal had traveled northwest, straight across the river. Cam had lost no time in taking the Interstate 87 bridge in pursuit, the bridge forming a line almost directly parallel to the movement of the tracer beam. Following 87 as it turned due north, he halted at Harriman. When the signal crossed that highway some ten miles north of where he waited, keeping to their original flight plan, the Cadillac again moved into action, now northwest on 17.

He was now entering Catskill country, an area dotted with plush mountain resorts for weekending New Yorkers, but also with its share of backwoods-type people who kept to themselves and demanded much the same of the vacationers. Also in these mountains was the man he sought. Somewhere close to a green hillside, a house, and a cave. At least that had been Ktara's reading of the blackmail note. Regardless, he'd know soon enough.

At Ellenville, he turned west on Route 52. As he did so, he noticed the car behind him for the first time. It was too far back for him to make out the number of its occupants. Other than its color, a dark blue, there was little he could tell about it. Little except its speed, which matched that of the Cadillac almost perfectly.

The road ahead was straight as far as the eye could see. And clear. Cam floored the accelerator. The speedometer jumped to ninety at which he held it steadily.

The blue car did its best to close the gap, then slacked off.

As did Cam. The town of Greenfield Park had sprung up as an obstruction to his speed. Once out of the town's western limits, he considered gunning the big car again, then reconsidered.

It was stupid of him. He was reacting to Navarre's pressure, his thinking getting careless. There was no way anyone could have followed him.

The blue car was again in the rearview mirror.

Coincidence. It had to be. Unless...

His right hand dropped to the scanner dial. He found the frequency of the bug soon enough. Very clever, he would give Navarre that. All of Cam's advance preparation had gone for nothing, the sounder probably having been planted yesterday morning by one of the lieutenant's cronies while he grilled Harmon. A pretty simple trick, but it had been effective.

Cam grinned. All right. This at least was a game he knew how to play, and he had one advantage. He knew he was being tailed. They'd gotten just a little too close, closer than they really had to get. He wondered why they'd do that, then he knew why.

They had to check to make sure. Navarre no doubt had warned them about the previous incident where the bug had been shifted to an innocent traveler. All right. Now they probably were sure. But so was Cam. What next?

He was no more than twenty miles from Woodbourne now. Checking a close-up section of his map, the signal coordinates came from some five miles south of there, just west of the town of Fallsburg. No communities between himself and Woodbourne, none between Woodbourne and Fallsburg. According to his map, it was all straight-flying road..

He gunned it.

Then, abruptly, changed his mind. Except for the car behind him there was nothing on the road except himself. As the Cadillac slowed, he hit the power brakes hard—once, twice, three times—bringing the big black car to a nose-dipping screeching halt. He was casual about getting out of the car and opening the hood.

He frowned, a bit overly exaggerated, perhaps, but if there were spy-glasses trained on him, he wanted them to get the right picture. In any case, the occupants of the blue car that was approaching with reduced speed could soon see his plight with the naked eye.

A man with car trouble.

A man needing help.

A man stepping out into the road and flagging down the first car passing by.

They had little choice as to their course of action. The blue car came to a halt beside the black limo. There were two men in the car.

'Trouble?' asked the man next to the driver.

'I guess,' Cam said. 'You know anything about cars?'

The two men looked at each other blankly, then the driver shrugged. 'Let's have a look, Jack.' Both Jack and the driver got out. As they looked under the hood of Cam's car, he appraised them. Jack was a wiry man in his early forties, the other was about the same age but bulkier. Both looked as if they could use a couple of hours sleep. Cam had considered giving them just that, but he had no desire to add assaulting these police officers to the other charges that might or might not be pending. He chose the easy way.

'Drop your guns on the pavement. Easy.'

The heads of both men jerked to where he stood. Their eyes located his Magnum easily.

'What guns?' Jack said.

'If you don't come up with a couple of them—and fast—I'll just have to do a little bullet surgery on those irregular lumps in front of your left hips. I don't like being followed, especially by people with guns. The police won't

like it much either, when I tell them.'

The driver laughed. 'The police? Listen, son—'

Jack shook his head quickly. 'Better do as he says, Ray.' He took his police special from its holster and carefully placed it on the roadway. Ray followed suit.

'Excellent,' Cam said. 'Now, if you two gentlemen would kindly begin walking back toward Greenfield Park—'

'Walking?' Ray said. 'Hey, Jack, we better tell this guy—'

Cam cut him off. 'You want to do that walking with shoes or without? I don't have all day. Move it!'

Jack scowled. 'You heard the man, Ray. Walk.'

'Jack—'

'Walk.' Jack turned to Cam. 'You'll be taking our car?' Cam stared at the man.

'Walk,' he said.

They walked. Cam waited until they were some thirty yards from him. The big Magnum fired twice, then twice more.

The Puerto Rican watched with satisfaction as the blue car sank to its wheel-rims, then slid behind the wheel of the Cadillac. As he pushed the gearshift into Drive, he smiled at the two men running toward him in the rearview mirror.

After their service revolvers, no doubt. They were welcome to them. The guns would be of little assistance. He'd be well out of range by the time they could cock the hammers. And they'd be useless in changing tires, even if the common unmarked police car carried four spares. Which it did not.

As his car shot forward with burning rubber, Cam punched the communicator button. Harmon should know that the wagon probably carried a spotter.

'Spot of trouble,' he said. 'Pun intended.'

The house was ramshackle, looking as if it had gone without repair of any kind since the day George Washington or one of his contemporaries might have slept there. It stood at the top of a hill, an overgrown dirt road giving a steeply inclined access to its reaches. Beside it was a truck, early Dodge. Very early and not especially well cared for.

There was no sign of any activity around the house or truck, had been none for the full twenty minutes Cam had been observing the landscape through his binoculars. He had checked out the location by as close to a triangulation method as the main road and a couple of dirt roads allowed. There was no doubt. This was the place.

'Fine,' Harmon had said. 'Our problem is that it's midday. We obviously can't use our major weapon until after dark. What's your suggestion as to how we proceed?'

'First, I suggest we don't wait. It's only a matter of time before my good friends Jack and Ray get back on my beam.'

‘You didn’t discard the finder?’

‘No. Depending on what *I* find up there, I just might be able to use some help.’

‘I’m not sure I like that idea, Cam. Why don’t you keep observing—and let me send Ktara to help. She could make it in a matter of hours. In the meantime, you can get rid of the finder and—’

‘Her kind of help I don’t need. Besides, our man might not stay put for a matter of hours. I’d like to check him out at least.’

Harmon grunted. Cam had put it to him straight, but had not forgotten that the professor was the boss. It was Harmon’s decision to make, and he made it.

‘All right. But keep your portable communicator on. And Cam—’

‘Sir?’

‘This is no ordinary man you’re up against. Be careful.’

‘I’ll be more than careful, Professor, but it’s not the man I’m worried about. It’s his flying friends.’

It was three-thirty when Cam made his move, when his feet began moving up the steep incline, the dirt pathway that led to the house far above.

The car had been left directly at the bottom of the hill. He’d thought about trying to conceal it, but then his cover story wouldn’t work. If he needed a cover story, he was a county survey taker, merely pegging his way up here to ask a couple of simple questions. Such as how many folks lived in this house, how many children, of what age, etcetera. Cam recognized that there might be an inconsistency in the fact that a county survey taker drove an expensive limousine, but the car was a long way down the hill and barely visible from the heights. Besides, he didn’t delude himself that any story, regardless of how imaginative, would have much sway with a multiple killer who had just collected one million dollars of good old U.S. currency.

NO TRESPASSING. KEEP OUT.

Cam shrugged at the sign. It was the third one he’d seen so far on his trek upward. He did not, however, shrug off the long double-barreled shotgun which stared him in the face as he came around a thick clump of bushes.

The man holding the weapon was tall and lean. He wore a long white laboratory coat and a look of determination as his thumb cocked back both hammers.

‘The signs mean what they say. Or is it possible you cannot read?’

‘I read quite well, thank you. But I have my job to do.’

‘And what job would that be which includes snooping around private property?’

Well, here goes. Cam explained his role as survey taker. ‘I’m supposed to visit all the houses in this area. The survey wouldn’t be complete if I miss any of them.’ He eyed the shotgun. ‘I suppose, if it’s more convenient for you, I can ask my questions right here.’

‘A survey taker?’ The thumb tapped the hammers hesitantly.

'Right. For the county.'

'In that case, where's your note pad? I don't recall ever seeing a survey taker without a note pad.'

'It's in the car, down the hill. I make my notes there. We find that writing down people's answers makes them feel uncomfortable. And, actually, the questions I have to ask are very few and simple.'

'Somehow you don't look much like a survey taker. I don't think I believe you.'

'That's—er—very perceptive of you, sir.' Also pretty smart on the old man's part was the distance he was keeping from Cam. There was no chance whatsoever that he could reach that shotgun before both barrels could blow big holes in his chest. 'As a matter of fact, that survey line is just a door-opener. Actually, I'm selling encyclopedias.'

'We don't need any encyclopedias.'

'Ah, but we've got out a new edition. If you'll come with me, down to the car, I'll be happy to—'

'I said—'

'You don't need any,' Cam completed. He exhaled heavily. 'All right, I know when I meet up with sales resistance I've no chance of overcoming. I'll be saying goodbye, then. Sorry to have been an inconvenience.'

'I don't think so. I don't think you'll be going right now.'

Cam's face took on a look of concern. 'Sir?'

'Take off your jacket. Lay it on the ground and then back off from it.'

Dandy. His communicator, switched on, was in the jacket pocket. What was worse, the butt of the Magnum was exposed as the jacket zipper came down. Carefully, with no sudden movement as per instructions, the gun joined the jacket on the dirt trail.

'Do all of you salesmen carry weapons?'

'Things being what they are these days, it pays to be careful.'

The man in the white coat smiled. 'Keep your hands very high,' he said as Cam backed off from the jacket. When he had gun and jacket in his left hand, he jerked the barrels of the shotgun toward the top of the hill.

'I think you will be staying with us for a short while. It's your cooperation which will dictate whether you'll stay as a dead man or one who continues to draw breath. Move now—upward along the trail—but very slow.'

In the Westhampton study, Harmon turned to Ktara.

'What do you think?'

'lie does not intend to kill Cam. Not now. It is that he does not see himself as a killer—he does not believe in soiling his own hands in such an act. He has the more impersonal method of dealing death. It is the state of mind of men in wartime. One whose mortality would not allow him to kill another man does not think of what it is he really is doing when he orders troops into battle or when he pushes a button which causes bombs to drop from an aircraft. An impersonal killing which does not equate at all in the mind with

murder.'

'Is there time for you to get to him?'

'I think yes. Although, from the vibrations I get from the communicator, there are thoughts of a deep hole of some kind. A trick which Cam is being led toward....'

The thin man with the shotgun called from behind Cam. 'No, not that way. Around to the right of the house, this side of the truck—toward that rock hill.' Cam had no choice but to follow the directions. And when his boot stepped upon the suddenly movable landscape he had no choice but to follow the boot's direction. Tangle-wrapped in the earth-covered ground, Cam plummeted.

Straight down.

His fall was broken by two collisions with the side of the rock, then by the final thud at the bottom. As he gained his feet, he looked upward at the small hole through which he could see the sky. It was like looking up from the bottom of a very deep well.

A small face stared down at him.

'Now, Mr. Policeman, you will wait there until the time comes when you will learn what you have come to learn. This shaft serves as the main entrance and exit for my little friends when they go hunting. It was my plan that the huntings would be over, but I now see that there must be at least one more expedition. We had an agreement, myself and your people, and now that agreement has been violated. By your presence here, it has been violated. Thus my creatures will fly again tonight. They will kill again tonight. A totally unnecessary death—had only faith been kept with me.'

'I don't understand what you're talking about!' Cam shouted upward.

'Perhaps, perhaps not Underlings of officialdom rarely are told everything. But understand this, young man. Tonight I shall make an example of my victim, then I shall tell your city how much additional money their perfidy had cost them. You yourself will die either before or after the expedition has been mounted. I have not yet made up my mind as to that.'

'Then tell me who else it is you're killing! Who is to die because you think I'm a cop?'

A low chuckle. 'Why, the mayor of your city. Naturally.'

And then the face was gone.

Harmon grimaced. 'The mayor can be moved and protected,' he said.

'True,' Ktara agreed. 'But the bats will attack his residence nonetheless. And they will kill several unless ...'

'Unless you are there to stop them.'

'I and another.'

Harmon nodded. The clock over the fireplace showed the time to be four-thirty-five. Ktara knew his thoughts without having to read them:

'It will be dark soon.'

'Which means there will be no time for you to assist Cam and be ready at

Gracie Mansion. He's on his own.'

The woman smiled grimly. 'He seems to prefer it that way.'

'If we knew when the attack would be...'

'We do not know.'

The professor sighed. He picked up the telephone. Moments later he was explaining to Proctor that the mayor's residence would have to be guarded heavily. Ktara interrupted to give an instruction of her own:

'It is important. No flamethrowers.'

Harmon looked at her quizzically. Then covering up the mouthpiece so that Proctor could not hear, he asked her why.

She told him why.

Chapter Ten

Cam made three tries at climbing out of the shaft before he gave it up as a lost cause. There simply were not enough good hand- and foot-holds. Plus the fact that his left shoulder was throbbing from what was probably a torn ligament.

According to his wristwatch, it was five-fifteen when he began looking for an alternate escape route. The watch said five-twenty-five when he found what he was looking for. The slit in the face of the rock wall might be large enough to allow the passage of the flying killers, but was too small for him to get through, even if he could get himself into the proper position to make the passage.

The slit was some seven feet from the bottom of the shaft, running almost horizontally for about sixteen inches. Thrusting his fingers into the cleft he felt a damp mass. There was more than enough room for both hands, as the width of the slit at its widest point was about four inches. Odd.

The more Cam looked at it, the odder it seemed. The more he thought about it, the less likely it was that this was the bats' passageway. It just didn't seem large enough. Obviously, there had to be another cleft in the rock somewhere. Perhaps higher up on one of the walls.

Two more attempts to climb upward gained him nothing except a skinned left knee. He hadn't gotten high enough to be *sure* that there was no break in the rock wall above him but he sensed that the key to the exit was still that almost perfect horizontal slit which—

Almost perfect.

He looked at it again, in the light available to him, in the light which was fast fading.

It was *too* perfect, that slit. Too perfect to be natural. And if it wasn't natural...

On his hands and knees now, he' examined the shaft wall directly under the cleft, giving particular attention to the place where it met the rock floor. Almost a perfect ninety degree angle. Again too perfect. Maybe ...

But no. There was no real separation between wall and floor, none at least that his fingertips could discover. But there was another way he might be more sure.

Now he dropped his chest and stomach flat, arching his neck backward and pushing the lower part of his face into the ninety-degree angle, and pressing his lips flush into the angle to the point of pain. Inhaling deeply through his nose, he filled his lungs to their full capacity. With a concentration both of mind and body, he let the air exhale through his mouth, slowly but with a steady power. At first there was resistance, his lips being pushed back from the rock, but he forced them back into position. Then—

In a rush his lungs emptied. Inhaling instinctively, he felt dust in his mouth

and throat. He also felt something else. A dampness which matched that his fingers had felt on the cleft above. Coughing, he got to his feet. There was an additional test he could make.

Moving to the right of where he stood, he struck the rock wall with the bottom of his fist. The sound resulting was what he expected, the soft impact of padded flesh against rock. A little back toward the left now. The same sound. A little more to the left.

A deeper sound, more of a thudding, hollow sound. Cam grinned, as he stepped backward three well-measured paces.

It had to be a door of some kind. Well disguised, yes, but not the work of Nature. And what man could do, man could undo.

Maybe!

With concentrated power, Cam executed a flying thrust kick at the hollow area. The jolt of contact nearly dropped him on his back, but his training was too good for that. He was more interested in what the blow had done to the wall.

It had had its effect. The top split had grown to a full two feet in length. Additionally, some of the rock seemed to have broken on a line vertical to the floor. Cam took a closer look. His grin grew wider. Behind the vertical crack was something that wasn't rock. It was wood. One more good kick should do it.

He stepped back and drove his right boot sole in hard.

Well, *two* good kicks, maybe.

This time when boot and door connected, boot and door kept moving. The crash of the wood flattening to the rocky floor echoed through the deep blackness like a twenty-one cannon salute. There was now just a little dusky light spilling in from the shaft behind him. He saw that he was in a large cave, the floor of which tilted downward. From what seemed very far ahead there was a flicker of light. He moved toward it. Considering the unholy racket he'd just made upon entering, it seemed a contradiction for him to be moving so stealthily, but it came naturally.

The light was farther away than Cam had thought possible. True, he was moving slowly and cautiously in the darkness, but the minutes passing seemed very long. Still, he was in no mood to rush his progress. The cave floor was anything but smooth, and the last thing he needed at the moment was a twisted ankle to add to his throbbing shoulder—or for that matter a crack on the head from some out-jutting crag. Thus, as his feet felt their way forward, his arms continually moved in groping circles before his face and upward. It was a precaution that paid off, he discovered, even though the knuckles of his right hand were bloodied by a timely but grating collision with a portion of the roof which had suddenly closed in around him. Or so it seemed.

Feeling with both hands just inches above his head, he discovered that it was a natural ledge, a horizontal piece of rock no more than two feet square which jutted out from the cave wall. Its thickness ranged from eight to twelve

inches. Testing its strength, he pulled down on the ledge with straining right arm and chest muscles, but before he had released his grip he had discarded the idea that made him want to test it. A possible hiding place, he had thought, but no. It wouldn't do. In the first place, he'd hardly be hidden from any kind of light wielded by a human approaching him from either direction. In the second place, the killer bats didn't even need the light.

He moved on.

Still he felt himself moving deeper and deeper into the earth, although the incline was much less now. But the subtle changes of the inner ear responded to the also subtle changes of air pressure, and there was a more hollow quality to the small sounds which came to him in the darkness. Also, with each forward step he took the air seemed to get cooler, more damp.

Even so, the light ahead seemed no larger, no closer, than when he'd first spotted it. There was a feeling in the back of his mind that he was running out of time, but there could be

no hurrying. He didn't dare move his feet forward at a pace any faster than they now—

He stopped in his tracks.

His left foot had come up against something.

The wall? No. The light was still before him. Besides, the thing at his toe seemed to be of less consistency than rock. Carefully, he squatted down, his hands before him.

His flat palms came to rest on the top of a box.

That's all it was. A cardboard box. An empty cardboard box, judging by the ease with which it moved. The top, however, was taped. Which meant that, if it was empty, the bottom probably was open. He started to lift it, then stopped, remembering the Greek story of Pandora: the girl who had opened a box expecting riches, but instead loosed upon herself and the world a host of malevolent creatures. Lord knew, there were malevolent creatures somewhere in this place.

But under the cardboard box? Hardly.

Nonetheless, Cam's ear went flat to the top of the box and stayed there for five full seconds before he lifted up the bottom. It was nothing but a large box with the bottom cut off. He set it carefully behind him and straightening his body, moved a foot out toward the light. Again it was his left foot. Again it came in contact with cardboard. Again the box was empty.

The fourth box he discovered was not. Like the others, it had no bottom, but unlike them there was more than air trapped between its walls.

The rustling sound which met his ears as he lifted the box sent a chill down his spine.

The wings of Pandora's monsters? Those of his own doom?

No. The sound had stopped as suddenly as it had begun. His every sense alert, he moved a boot tip toward the place the box had been. It touched something—something which, when he added a little more pressure, *crinkled*.

Cam shook his head. If he had stumbled onto what he thought he might have stumbled onto, it was Pandora in reverse. Fingers that, moments ago, he thought might be grasping for monsters grasped instead for the riches he now suspected were—

They were. Ten tightly wrapped parcels, their size and weight most familiar to the man who, during the previous night, had placed them on top of the Delacorte clock.

A million dollars. It would buy a lot. Maybe, just maybe, 't could buy Cam his life. At the very least, it would give him a lot more bargaining power than he had before discovering it. But where—?

Instinctively, he thought of the perfect place. If—

Yes. The light ahead of him must be fairly close now, because its rays were illuminating parts of the rock behind him. Where the light did not reflect back, that was his trail. The one he now backtracked.

It took him two trips. Two agonizingly slow trips back to the rock ledge, but when they were completed the parcels lay upon that shelf of stone, and the boxes were back into as close a proximity to their original positions as Cam could manage in the dark.

With a renewed sense of confidence, he again moved toward the light.

It was a kerosene lamp, he saw, as he stepped into the naturally carved room which contained it. One of three lamps, all lighted and placed at intervals on a table which held one of the strangest assortments of movable bric-a-brac Cam had ever seen. He was alone in the room, or so he thought until he looked for the other exit-entrance he knew had to be there. There was a section of wall darker than those around it. Emerging from the darkness was a man with features Cam recognized at once.

What he did not recognize was the man's total lack of comprehension. 'Wh-what are you doing here?'

'I let myself in by the back door,' Cam said.

'Back door? What back door? Just who are you? *Answer me!*'

The shout brought with it another sound; this time it was the unmistakable sound of rustling wings. Cam looked up. He saw nothing, but he had no doubts now as to the killer bats' whereabouts.

He looked at the old man with steady eyes. 'Keep your voice down. You might disturb your friends who, in turn, might be tempted to attack me. Then you might never find out where I've hidden your money.'

'Money? I don't know what you're talking about.'

'Did someone mention money?' said a cheerful voice from the darkness behind the man in the white lab coat.

The man who had been confronting Cam stepped from before the passageway, moving farther into the room. Mindful of the creatures above him, Cam dismissed the thought of attacking him. Then the thought came to him that his eyes were playing tricks.

'I asked if someone mentioned money,' said the man with the shotgun.

With the shotgun, the lab coat and the exact duplicate face of the first man.

The twinness of the two brothers had its effect not only upon Cam, but also upon the two other newcomers who were prodded into the light by the shotgun.

Jack and Ray looked as though they'd had a very hard day.

The shotgun gestured toward the two men whose wrists were handcuffed behind them.

'Found them skulking around that car of yours. An excellent machine, I must say.'

'I think so,' Cam said.

'Yes. And completely outfitted with the latest communication devices. All now smashed to pieces, I'm afraid. My original idea was to place these gentlemen in the shaft beside you, but when I discovered you were no longer there, I decided to use the other entrance.'

The twin without the gun raised his eyebrows. '*Other* entrance? There is only one entrance, Brother.'

'No, Brother, there are two. One of them you and I use in our comings and goings. The other is used mainly by our little friends.'

Cam nodded grimly. 'True. When, for example, they fly south to kill.'

'To *kill*.'

'Less volume, Brother. You disturb our friends. And they have work to do tonight.'

'What kind of... work?'

'To gather more riches for ourselves, just as we have talked about. It has been a very eventful three days, Brother, the details of which I will tell you about later. I apologize for not going into all of them before this, but I was not sure of your ethical standards. Strange, that twins should not know these things about each other, but true nonetheless. Already we have got ourselves a beautiful automobile—pity about all the broken glass and loose wires inside, but that can be cleaned up. By the way, young man, I also smashed the unit I discovered in your jacket pocket.'

'Automobile,' the brother said dully.

'And money—much money. The money, no doubt, you and our friend were discussing.'

The brother without the gun looked at Cam, then at his look-alike. 'He said ... he said ... something about hiding my money. I didn't know what he meant.'

Evidently the gunman did. His eyes darted toward the room from which Cam had entered. 'You found the money?'

Before Cam had a chance to reply, the other brother broke in:

'What money? Where is it? Where did it come from?'

'In due time, Brother. For now, kindly get some good thick rope for this man's hands. Pity you policemen don't carry more than one set of handcuffs. We shall have to do things the crude way.'

The rope was found and wrapped expertly about Cam's wrists behind his back. Then, as the shotgun directed the three prisoners to stand with their backs toward one another, the sets of wrists were bound together. The gunman checked the knots, his tugging sending shafts of pain through Cam's shoulder.

'Very, very good, Brother. Now, if you gentlemen will lower yourselves to the floor, we shall truss up your ankles. We surely don't want any of you going anywhere—not until we're ready, that is.'

It was not until this chore was accomplished that the shotgun changed hands, and the brother who was knowledgeable about the money went into the room with the boxes, one of the kerosene lamps in his hand. From Cam's vantage point, he could not see what was going on in the next room but he could hear. Boxes were being thrown in every which way, from the sound of it.

Above him, the wings began rustling uncomfortably.

When the white-coated man came back into the room where they waited, he was smiling.

'So it is true. You did find the money, and have hidden it. That is most amusing, young man. You must realize that it is only a matter of time before we find it. There are not all that many hiding places in our underground home, as you must have discovered yourself. But I think I shall enjoy things more if you tell us where the money is voluntarily. And I think you will do that, yes—after some of my little friends begin to attempt to persuade you. What do *you* think?'

Cam said nothing. As for the two policemen to whom he was bound, they too evidently judged silence to be the better part of valor. The second, uninformed, brother, however ...

'These men are... policemen?'

'All but the youngest, but there is no reason to fear, Brother. Allow me to show you what will happen to them—long before they can do us any harm.' He took a silvery whistle from his coat pocket and blew on it lightly. A lone bat flew down to the top of the long table. Then something else was brought from the pocket.

'Here, Spartacus. Pick a card,' Adrian Abelard said.

When the king bat had done as directed, the man took it from the creature's mouth and displayed it to his brother.

'You, August, have always viewed my games with your little trained friends as distractions, meaningless fancies which got in the way of their real work. But look, Brother, at the message General Spartacus gives us. The card he's chosen *is* his real work, and that of his mighty winged forces. It is, of course, a prearranged choice, but that does not lessen its meaning.'

The ex-vaudevillian fanned the full deck so that his brother and the three prisoners could see the faces of the cards. They all were the same, all matching the card Adrian had taken from the king bat's teeth.

The Ace of Spades, card of death.

The fire in the scientist's eyes was bright.

'You have used my creatures to *kill!*'

'Only as a demonstration, Brother. Only to demonstrate just how successful all your work has been. And it has been, August. They follow their orders beautifully. All they need is to be shown what is expected of them—and they perform so well.'

'But it was never my intention—'

'That is true. What you desired was applause from that community of academics who so rudely dismissed your ideas before. But really, August, even were you to present to these same people the proof of your theories, do you think they would welcome you back to the fold? Hardly. They would hate you for showing them that the impossible was possible. They would band together as never before to get rid of this blight upon their pat pronouncements. Regardless of who was right and who was wrong, once again you would be dismissed as a charlatan, laughed out of all respectable circles. I could not let that happen, Brother. But your work has not gone for nothing, not at all. You may never receive the kind of recognition you have longed for, but the other part of it—the reward of riches—is ours. In addition, both of us have proved, if only to ourselves, that we are masters in our fields. You, August the scientist, have shown yourself to be without peers. And I, I—Abelard the Great—have put on one of the greatest shows on earth!'

'Then... it is over? All the killing?'

Adrian shook his head. 'No. There must be one more outing tonight. Then, afterward, we must get rid of these three.'

'They are policemen, you said.'

'Two of them. This one is not.' He looked directly at Cam. 'I took the liberty of removing your automobile's papers from the glove compartment, young man.' Turning back to his brother: 'A very interesting development, August. You see, I had planned to make a demonstration tonight, my victim to be the mayor of New York.'

'How? I mean, how do they kill? I did not train them to—'

A smile came over Adrian's face.

'Of course. The method. But you are wrong in one way, Brother. You trained them to perform actions. I merely added a few touches. Albeit deadly touches. Look here.'

He opened a drawer under the table top and took out two shiny items. Cam had seen them before.

'Little sleeves, very sharp. They fit over our workers' wing thumbs like so.' He demonstrated on the wings of the bat called Spartacus. 'This is one of their methods—in addition, of course, to the very effective teeth with which your crossbreeding has endowed them.'

He then brought an additional item from his lab-coat pocket.

'This you will recognize, August. It's very similar to the sounding devices you have used to bring our little friends to various precise spots within our

caves. It emits a sound, but one which I can vary. At one level it is an inducement to smash through panes of glass. At another it is a powerful stimulus to kill. Verbal commands are helpful as well, but I prefer not to be physically at the scene during the bloodshed. Thus I must shortly be on my way to place this particular device. It is a bit of a lengthy drive, but I shall be travelling in style. In your Cadillac, young man.'

August Abelard nodded. 'You go, then, to place this at the mayor's residence?'

Adrian smiled. 'That was my original intention, but no, I'll not be going there. Now, if you'll sheath all our little warriors, August, I'll be off to show them where they are to go. It now is six-forty-five. In two hours from now, simply release all of our flock. They will know the way.'

'But where, Adrian? Who is to die?'

'The person who no doubt is responsible for betraying me, for going against my instructions. As it happens, his name is one I've heard you mention many times, Brother—one of those who called your ideas insane. The registration card in the Cadillac was very helpful, bearing both his name and address.'

He grasped his brother by the shoulders. 'Tonight your little creatures extract a personal vengeance, August. It is a pity we shall not be there to see them tear Professor Damien Harmon apart, bit by bit.'

Chapter Eleven

‘You’re going to let it happen?’ Cam said. ‘You’re going to release those bats and let your brother kill Professor Harmon?’

It was now seven-forty. There were bats everywhere about the rock-hewn room, all of them wearing the ripping metal sheaths. It was the fourth or fifth time Cam had tried to engage the old scientist in some kind of conversation, but the man had ignored him, simply going about his business, following his brother’s instructions and humming a tune in an off-key but satisfied pitch. This time, however, his work completed, he looked up from the chair in which he sat, the shotgun cradled across his thin legs, and surveyed the three men who sat on the cave floor before him.

‘Yes,’ he said reflectively. ‘I fully intend that what Adrian has planned should happen. As he said, I only wish I was there in the room when my creatures rip out the stone heart of, Damien Harmon. He was a member of the board of trustees which ...’

The man’s voice trailed off, but his eyes seemed to be growing brighter. Cam now realized what he should have suspected from the start. There was no need to vocalize it, but one of the policemen—the one named Ray—did so:

‘He’s crazy. Insane.’

August Abelard’s head perked toward the policeman.

‘Insane, is it? Perhaps you are right. All these years I’ve been working to vindicate my reputation and it is Adrian who has discovered the only workable way. Yes *Professor* Damien Harmon will die, and after him, others. There are others who were trustees as well. I only hope they still live—so that they may die the death I have prepared for them.’

He wrung his hands in satisfaction. ‘Yes, to think that it would be Adrian to show me the way.’

‘Adrian only cared about the money,’ Cam said. His mind was racing now. Too much time already had passed. There was no way this man could be reasoned with, no way he could be convinced to set them free. Meanwhile Harmon was alone. He was sure of it, even able to picture the old professor sitting in his study. Alone, because those who might be able to protect him were in Manhattan, watching for an attack that would not come. If the killer bats left this cave...

There was only one way to stop them. *He* had to be the one. But he was trussed up like a birthday present. So the idea was somehow to get himself untrussed. As he saw it, there were two possibilities. Both of them revolved around the million dollars he had hidden.

‘The money,’ he continued. ‘That’s the important thing—to Adrian, at least. He would be pleased with you if you had it for him by the time he got back.’

The man with the shotgun nodded slowly. ‘But you hid the money. I know

you did.'

'That's right,' Cam said. 'But I could go and get it—if you let me loose.'

The insane man shook his head. 'No. Adrian said to keep you right here. He didn't say anything about untying you.'

So much for possibility number one. Nonetheless—

'But he would be pleased if you found the money,' Cam prodded.

'Yes. He would be very pleased. You could tell me where it is.'

'I could, but I won't.'

The unfrocked scientist considered. 'I could make you tell me. My bats could make you tell me.'

'Unfortunately, Adrian didn't say anything about doing that. You're not supposed to get them upset. They have a job to do—or don't you remember?'

'Of course I remember! I also remember Adrian saying that there aren't that many places you could have hidden it. I can find it myself!'

He got up from his chair, a crooked smile of determination on his face.

Possibility number two had worked out just fine. The three captives were suddenly alone in the room. Alone with a cave full of bats.

Cam spoke quietly. 'The table top. We've got to get to it. There ought to be something there we can use to cut the ropes.'

Ray replied doubtfully: 'Standing up won't be easy. Nor will getting through all those bats.'

'Getting killed won't be either,' Jack snapped. 'Do like Sanchez says. If we can get his hands free, we've got a chance.'

Cam explained how he thought they could do it. 'I just hope your backs are strong enough to support my weight,' he said. Then the work began. 'Easy, *easy!*' he commanded as, stumbling and scraping, feet doubled under knees and then With a lurch on Cam's signal the three-man unit rose with the thrusts of three pairs of legs.

The bats stirred during this movement, but only two left their perches, one from the floor, another from the table which Cam now faced. When they had settled back down, the three men were ready for phase two.

'All right. Not too fast now,' the Puerto Rican said as he pushed his weight up onto the back of the other two men who, in turn, pushed off with their feet backward toward the table, then straightened up to bring Cam's feet down, a brake. The brake held almost too well. The reversal of power almost dropped the two policemen to their faces. Tottering to steadiness, they saw with unspoken satisfaction that they had moved about a foot and a half toward their goal.

They also saw—and heard and felt—that they had disturbed the winged killers. Fortunately the creatures did not feel threatened. It was only by accident that one of the silvery sheaths clipped Ray behind the ear.

'Again,' Cam said. The word came out hard. He had some pain of his own to deal with.

Again the two cops braced themselves, and Cam again pushed himself

onto their backs.

His jaw muscles stood out like steel cables as the pain from his damaged shoulder shot through his system. Up, then down, his booted feet striking the rock and sending a new bolt of agony through his body.

And sending winged fury all about them, but a fury which again settled down quickly.

‘Twice more should do it,’ he said through his teeth.

‘Yeah,’ Ray said. ‘By then I should have a double hernia.’ Nonetheless, his back bent down with Jack’s as Cam pushed up for the third and fourth times.

The Puerto Rican had been eyeing the table from stem to stern since the operation had started. There were several pieces of glass which could be broken and used to slice his bonds. No knife, unfortunately. But it wasn’t until his thighs were pressed against the table that he saw the perfect tool. Its location was almost as perfect.

‘To my right—your left. I’ll give the word when we’ve reached the right spot.’

In another shuffling-scraping limb-stretching motion they made it.

‘Good. Jack—can you come around more to face the table?’ Jack could and did. He looked down between himself and Cam.

The drawer which had held the bat’s thumb-sheaths was almost directly below their fingers. Only two remained.

‘Both of them, if we can,’ Cam said. ‘Now, let’s try to squat—together.’

Cam’s fingers being longer than those of the other two men, he reached the two steel implements first. ‘Got them. Now—back to our original—’

The cocking hammers of the shotgun caused the bats to scurry. Both sounds and sights cut Cam off.

‘What do you think you’re doing?’ August Abelard demanded. ‘Sit down back where you were—at once.’

The three men complied.

‘You thought you could free yourselves, did you? It is fortunate I returned in time.’

‘I take it you found the money,’ Jack said bitterly.

‘Not at all, but we shall, we shall. But I had to return at this time for another, more important reason. It is time for me to release my little friends.’

‘*Don’t do it!*’ Cam warned, but the warning fell on deaf ears.

The whistle already was in the man’s mouth. Within seconds the bat horde was in the air around them.

Then they were gone.

Clucking to himself like a crazed chicken, the old man in the white coat again left. Without a word, the policemen held their arms taut, knowing that Cam was setting to work on his ropes. Inserting the tips of his little fingers into the sheaths, he worked them like saws. Back and forth they went across two strands of the thick hemp. Back and forth until his hands were aching from the effort.

But the effort paid off when, with a pull that sent a bolt of lightning through his shoulder, his wrists' were free. Within an instant, his ankles were unbound,

'Hey – us!' Ray shouted as Cam moved from them, one of the kerosene lanterns in his hand.

'Shut up!' Jack ordered. 'He's got something else to do first.' Cam found the shotgun in the room with the boxes. Hefting it he called out into the blackness beyond the lantern light:

'You can't get out that way, old man. You know it and I know it, so why not come back here right now?'

But his question was met with silence, as he knew it would be.

He went back to the others, bringing the weapon with him. With quick slices of the sharp sheaths, he cut their leg bonds. As they rose to their feet, he jerked a finger at their wrists.

'You got keys for those?'

'In the car. An extra set. The old man got the first. The first old man, I mean. Speaking of whom, what about the other one?'

'He can wait,' Cam said. 'What I need now is to get to your car radio. Can you lead me out of here the way you came in? The way I came in is impassable.'

Jack nodded. 'I'll go to the car with you. Ray will stay at the top to make sure Grandfather Bat stays put. Let's move.'

Cam couldn't have put it any better. They moved. Through the dark passageway, then upward through natural corridors of rock, now easier to see because of the benevolent light of the kerosene lamp, then through the plywood door where Ray was left to intercept the old man if he came that way.

The night air seemed colder than that they'd left, but there was a cleaner quality about it. Neither Cam nor the policeman stopped to appreciate such niceties, however. They moved down the pathway at a run. They both wanted that car, each for his own reasons. At least Jack wasn't disappointed. Placing his right leg in the interior from the passenger side, his back to the dashboard, his locked hands thumbing open the glove compartment. With a dexterity one would not have expected from the man, he sent his fingers inside and, when they came out, they held a ring of clinking metal objects. 'The keys,' he said triumphantly.

'The radio,' Cam said dully.

It was smashed.

Cam looked upward toward the house. There were no telephone lines in sight. 'The car keys,' he said. 'Have you got them?'

Jack shook his head. 'The old man took them from Ray, but there ought to be—yes, here's a spare ignition key.' He had merely looked inside the glove compartment, Cam giving him no chance to reach inside with the comparatively awkward method he had used to get the first set of keys. As the

Puerto Rican inserted the key and turned it, the motor kicked over.

‘Hey!’ Jack said. ‘What’re you doing?’

‘I’m getting to a phone. Make up your mind whether you’re coming with me or riot.’

‘That’s police property!’

‘I’m not waiting very long, friend. Either in or out of the car, not halfway like now.’

‘At least undo these cuffs, will you?’

‘Don’t say you weren’t warned,’ Cam replied, the tone of his voice itself all the warning the policeman needed. He jumped clear as Cam’s acceleration closed the door on the passenger side with a soft thud. Dirt clods spun from the whining rubber as the police car thumped onto the highway.

The car had been facing north. Cam kept it that way. It was a toss-up between Fallsburg and Woodbourne, anyway.

He pulled beside the gasoline station pumps, asked that the tank be filled and for the phone. Within twenty seconds he was listening to the tone on the other end.

It was a busy signal.

Dammit. A fine time for Harmon to be—

But he couldn’t be. If he was talking on one phone, the rollover would bring a second call in on the other. Harmon couldn’t be using both receivers at once, and he was alone in the house.

Or he was supposed to be.

Cam looked at his watch. It was nine-fifteen. The bat horde had not a chance of having arrived yet; they wouldn’t even be close. But Adrian Abelard probably was there already.

He dialed the number again.

Still busy.

He dialed the operator. ‘Could you check a number for me please? I keep getting a busy signal and was wondering if you could tell me if there is talking on the line.’

A girl with a pleasant sounding voice told him to hold on for a moment. Then: ‘No, sir. There is no conversation. I’ll report the trouble to the proper service department.’

Cam hung up and ran to the car, giving the station attendant a ten-dollar bill and driving off before the man came back with the change. He had seen the Woodbourne police station coming through town that morning. From there, using their radio, he could—

Do what?

Get a squad of police sent to the Westhampton manor? But what good would that do? The police had proved they were not effective against the flying killers.

He braked the car and brought it to a standstill.

She had been effective, and her Master had said *he* could control them.

But they both, right now, were probably in Manhattan.

Cam looked at his watch again. There might be time for them to ...

If he...

He closed his eyes and concentrated. He'd never tried to send a mental signal before.' Her talent was beyond question, once she decided she wanted to pick up a signal. She had very few limitations, one of which was—

Metal. She couldn't read Harmon's mind well because of the plate over his frontal lobes.

He stepped out of the car and refocused his concentration. Her talent was beyond question. As for his own, he had no idea.

'I'm sorry, my dear,' Sanford Proctor said. 'I didn't mean to creep up on you unannounced. I merely didn't want to interrupt.'

The woman in black stepped from the dark shadows formed by two rows of hedges coming close together.

'Interrupt, Mr. Proctor? No one is with me.'

Proctor narrowed his eyes in an attempt to pierce the blackness. 'I suppose it's age,' he said. 'I was certain I saw—but no matter.' He looked back toward the house and the searchlights which, cutting into the night sky, seemed to bathe the upper regions in some kind of unholy light.

'An odd sort of affair, isn't it?' he said.

'You are no stranger to the odd, Mr. Proctor.'

He nodded slowly. 'I suppose that is true, Miss. But there are degrees of oddness. I've been involved in weird crimes, yes, and have often employed unorthodox methods, as I suspect my good friend Damien Harmon has as well. And yet this present business makes me uncomfortable, speaking very frankly. Uncomfortable in an inexplicable way, which in its inexplicable nature makes me, in turn, even more uncomfortable.'

The woman's voice was soft. 'You mean that you are hard-pressed for a rational explanation.'

He looked at her with a start. 'Why, yes. My very thoughts, in fact. However that may be, I strongly suspect that Damien would not feel as uncomfortable as I am right now. Moreover, I suspect that you are part of the reason.'

'I?'

'Part. You see, I keep remembering that Damien asked me for four special passes. Damien has one, his man Sanchez another. You have one as well, but it is the fourth card that intrigues me.'

Ktara said nothing.

'It was used, you know. This very evening. The cards are numbered as you may have noted, and one of my men was shown the fourth card tonight. About an hour ago. My man came upon this—well—*giant* was the word he used. A tower of a man dressed in black, with wide shoulders and a strange accent. Except perhaps for the accent—oh yes, and the black hair—I might have thought it would have been Sanchez. Speaking of whom—'

‘Yes,’ the woman said, a curious glow building up in the center of her eyes.

‘I just wondered whether you’ve heard from him. Whether he’s reported to Damien, since he—’

‘No, he...’

‘Miss, is something wrong?’

The glow was gone now, her stare vacant.

‘Miss?’

The eyes closed, then opened. Other than the pale green color which always was there, they were normal. ‘I’m sorry, Mr. Proctor. What is it you were saying?’

Proctor laughed uneasily. ‘I was saying—never mind. You are all right, aren’t you? You looked as if you were listening to someone who was speaking to you from another world.’

‘Another world? Mr. Proctor, I’m afraid your imagination roams.’

But he was not far from wrong. Although the person she was listening to was very much a part of this world, he to whom she passed along the message—the large black shadow which slipped further from the lighted area into the blackness—was, while a part of this world, a creature of other realms as well.

The fire in the great stone hearth was burning low; the cold chill which had reluctantly retreated from within the study of the Westhampton manor had now begun to seep back through the stone walls and into the room.

Damien Harmon, in his wheelchair in front of the oak desk, did not notice. Harmon was asleep.

The man who watched him from the hallway was not.

A grim smile of satisfaction came over the fleshy face of Hank Navarre as he softly moved from the doorway to the study. He was taking a big chance, he knew, but somewhere in this old house there had to be the proof he was looking for. Both cars were gone from the garage, that strange-looking woman having taken the station wagon earlier tonight. As for Sanchez, wherever he had gone, he had a good firm tail.

But still he was taking a chance with Harmon here at the house. If the old man woke up and discovered him ...

But hell, Navarre knew how to be quiet. If the old guy hadn’t roused himself during the detective’s lock-picking the front door, he should be pretty safe for now. After he had what he was looking for, he didn’t care if the entire world woke up and caught him.

There would be a flap, sure. Harmon had some powerful friends. What’s more, Navarre was disobeying orders being here. Not that he had to be at the mayor’s, no. He was ordered to take charge of the detachment there. Delegating his command was within standard operating procedure, as long as no one of authority had told him that he *personally* had to be on the scene. Not like the previous night, when he was told that in so many words. But the previous night he had gone by the book as well, and had delegated the

important work. Which had not been at the UN, just as tonight it would not be at Gracie Mansion.

Yes, there would be a flap. Because he had been ordered to lay off Sanchez and to stay away from the Harmon house. Power. Every day it was getting more and, more impossible for an honest cop to do his job. Just let the investigation get a little bit close to somebody with a relative or friend with a bit of political clout and the whistle blew—terminate this line of inquiry, best move on to something else.

But not this time. No. By the time the high-and-mighty Mr. Sanford Proctor pulled his invisible strings, it would be too late for any face-saving change in investigative direction. Navarre would have the goods on Harmon and his ex-cop assistant.

He even knew where to look. At least, he knew where he was going to look first, and in a house with some thirty-odd rooms in it that was a good start.

Any cop who fooled around at all with locks couldn't miss it. The door in the hallway. From the look of it, it led down to the basement. As the heavy detective played a pencil-light beam on it now, he was almost certain of it.

The lock was a strange one, a heavy-duty thing weighted and sprung so that whenever opened and closed the lock would automatically catch. It was not a commercial unit, but handmade, probably by the same Puerto Rican who thought he was an electronic genius—or at least posed as one.

For a brief moment, his attention moved to the panel some ten feet to the right of the door. From the buttons to the side of it, he recognized it for what it was. An elevator. Of course; to allow the wheelchair to move up and down through the house.

He considered using it now, then discarded the idea. It might make some kind of whirring sound. Sound was what he didn't need, especially now. He had ripped out the phone wires outside the house to insure a measure of quiet—and also to insure that, should he be discovered once he'd found his evidence, there would be no hasty telephone messages to the power centers which would discard his case before he'd presented it.

Hank Navarre did not like the powerful. He therefore did not like the wealthy, because money is power. So he did not like Damien Harmon, the old man of family wealth and supposed genius who had tipped his crooked hand by taking on a crooked cop as hired help.

Interesting.

The more he looked at the lock, the more he came to realize that he would have no need to use any kind of device to open it other than his fingers. It was not at all an effective block in opening the door—not from this side, anyway. Which made it all the more interesting, because of the obvious.

The idea of the lock was to keep the door shut *from the other side*.

Very interesting. And something else.

For the first time Hank Navarre felt uneasy. A coldness somewhere in the

pit of his stomach. As if a finger of ice had touched him deep within his soul.

He shook off the feeling. Probably just the damp air in this old house. All of these old houses, after all...

But all of these old houses weren't connected with a series of strange murders by killer vampire bats. Was it possible, that on the other side of this door... ?

His hand trembled, causing the pencil light to create weird shadows in the darkened hall. Steady. The worst he could expect to find beyond that door would be the bats themselves. And they wouldn't attack unless he disturbed them.

Unless, of course, the mere act of his opening the door would disturb them.

Maybe that was why there was no more complication to the lock on the door. Maybe, just maybe, the old man wasn't sleeping at all. Maybe he was simply pretending to be asleep, so that the nosy copper would walk into his own destruction without any help at all. Maybe ...

No. The old man *was* asleep.

And this *was* the door.

Switching the light to his left hand, he lifted the weighted bolt and pushed it against the spring until it was clear of its housing. The hand holding the light grasped the brass doorknob and turned it. He half-expected some type of alarm to sound. None did, but as the latch clicked back he felt the hairs on the back of his neck bristle.

The door opened inwardly, smoothly, without any sound at all, let alone the eerie squeaking door-sound which the circumstances almost dictated be part of all this. No sound came from beyond the opening, either.

Nor did any light. It was black as a coal mine within. Black as ...

A cave.

Navarre took a hesitant step forward, then followed it with another. His light told him that directly ahead was a steep set of stairs going downward, steps which at the bottom turned sharply to the right and no doubt opened up on the main room below. To his own right, two more steps ahead, was a light switch. Leaning against the heavy door, Navarre considered, then decided against using it. The pencil light would be enough for him to see what was below, and might not be enough to stir up whatever it was he was going to see below. Before moving down, however—

He detached his handcuffs from the back of his belt and, swinging the door back shut slowly, carefully placed them between door and wall so that the lock would not trip into its catch. Satisfied that his entrance would now also serve as an exit, he drew his service revolver from its hip holster and, training the light onto the stone stairwell, moved toward them.

Silently he moved, the only sound in his ears being his own pulsing blood. First step. Down with the right foot, then the left on to the same surface. Then listening. Nothing from below. Next step, carefully, then the one beyond. Still nothing. The next one now, moving a little more confidently, while the pencil

light darted above and ahead and all around him.

And then he hit the bottom landing and turned right, the light immediately shooting its beam upward toward the basement ceiling.

Nothing. Nothing except a couple of fluorescent light 'fixtures.

Still Navarre stayed where he was, the beam circling the ceiling to be sure. But no, there was nothing other than the nonfunctioning lights hanging from the surface, no kind of hold for the feet of a hundred or more killer creatures. But his pencil light was now picking up other things. Shelves, beakers, electronic equipment, workbenches, boxes in corners and a large open crate in the center of the room.

Navarre scowled. He hadn't hit the payday he'd expected, but still he might find something here. He was *sure* he'd find something here. First, it was their workroom; it ought to tell him something of what they were working on. Second, there was that locked door upstairs—that strangely arranged lock.

To his immediate left there was a workbench. Moving toward it he allowed his light to scan the objects which cluttered its top. Navarre knew very little about electronics, but he recognized complicated equipment when he saw it. But that was all he recognized—that it was complicated. Function and purpose of the multitude of items were totally unknown to him.

The coldness suddenly entered his stomach again.

Why? Hell, it's nothing but a workroom. Nothing to—

His flashlight hit upon one of the lower shelves. There were about a half-dozen large bottles filled with a dark substance. Chemicals of some kind, probably, but... there was something about the *color* of the substance, something familiar, something....

Detective Lieutenant Henry Navarre had seen a lot of blood in his years with the force, blood spilled on pavement and wood and stone on bright sunshiny mornings and dark streetlamp-hazed nights. He had seen it in bottles and bags, going into the bodies of men whose own blood had been spilled, either from protecting law and order or defying it. The light stayed put on one of the bottles.

Blood?

Vampire bats.

But blood in large bottles? *All that blood?*

Again the cold fingers gripped Navarre's innards. Quickly the light beam swirled around the room which he now confirmed was windowless. It was empty, of course. But still, for some unknown reason, Navarre's thumb cocked back the hammer of the revolver. It took him six paces to reach the bottles, six paces he was somehow not eager to take, six paces which, as he took them, seemed to bring him into an atmosphere which was increasingly colder.

The bottle was like ice to his touch.

Of course. The shelves were built right against the stone walls of the basement. It was natural that this part of the room should be colder than the

central portions. Natural? Was that a concept to be applied to any of this business?

Not if what was in those bottles was what he thought it was ...

He had set the pencil light and his weapon on the shelf above them, so that he could examine the glass containers more easily. The caps all were tightly sealed. Airtight.

Taking one bottle from the shelf he brought it up to his eyes, trying to look through the fluid contents to the light on its other side. The substance was opaque, but of a definite red color. Thicker than water.

Blood is thicker than water, so goes the old saying. Referring to matters of kinship maybe, but the proverb was a truism on its face value as well.

But there was a surer way to tell.

Gripping the bottle and its top with his huge hands, he twisted the cap and broke the seal. Even before the cap was completely off, he was fully on his feet. The odor of the fluid reached out and stabbed through his nostrils, even as he stepped backwards from the wall to avoid the relentless fumes. The objective viewer might ask why he did not thrust the bottle from him, but there was no objective viewer on the scene.

There was only Navarre, a Navarre shaken by having his suspicions confirmed. It was blood.

Blood. A synthetic, but so well constructed that it passed for the real thing—down to its nasty, sweet smell which no normal man could accept without feeling a sense of defilement.

Blood. To Hank Navarre, real blood, a large bottle full of it—

God! Six—*seven bottles of the stuff I*

The horror that smashed into the detective's brain blocked out from his consciousness the fact that his movement still was taking him from the wall and toward the center of the room, from the light into the darkness, from an unobstructed path to—

He was completely off balance when the calf of his leg struck—something. Reacting automatically, he grabbed for support to his sides, letting the unholy burden his hands had held fly from his flailing fingers. As the glass shattered on the stone floor, he himself toppled backwards, his hands now behind him to break his fall.

He was not prepared for what they touched.

Earth! Moist earth—in some kind of a box. That crate, yes!

The stench of the spilt blood in his nostrils, Navarre gagged as he pulled himself upward and crossed to the place he had left his light. When it was in hand, he directed the beam toward the box....

Which he now saw was no ordinary crate, but a casket.

A plush-lined casket filled with earth.

As the thought impacted upon his brain, a new wave of coldness went from the base of the neck down to the bottom of his spine. A casket. Filled with earth. Vampire bats. No, it couldn't be. Things like that weren't real. They

didn't exist. They couldn't!

The lights above him were suddenly blazing. Navarre recoiled, throwing his arms upward to block out the eye piercing fluorescent. Then there came the voice.

'You are a foolish man, Navarre.'

Whirling on his heel, the detective saw the speaker. The old man in the wheelchair was framed by the open elevator door panel, the dim light from within the lift bathing the top of his silver-haired head and bull-like shoulder with a pale-moon cast. Most of the man's face was hidden from either source of light, but the eyes were blazing.

'Very foolish. You have meddled in something beyond your understanding. I hope that the price you have to pay will not be too great.'

With a braveness he did not feel, the detective pointed an accusing finger at Harmon.

'You, Professor—you are the one who will pay! The law will fix you and your—hey! What are you *doing*?'

The panel-door was closing with Harmon still inside the lift. Before Navarre had a chance to move either for the door or for his weapon, the panel was sealed. A soft *whir*, barely a whisper, told him the elevator was in action.

He rushed to the shelf which held his gun, trying to avoid the blood bottles below them. Then, crossing the room at a run, he headed up the stone stairs. As his eyes came up above floor level, he saw that the handcuffs he'd left to keep the door open were now gone.

He was locked inside.

With the butt of his revolver he pounded the thick wood of the door.

'Harmon! You open this thing—do you hear me?'

There was no answer. No sound. Not for a full three seconds.

Then there was a tremendous sound, that of breaking glass. Not like the bottle he'd shattered downstairs, but a greater sound.

It was as if the whole front of the house had caved in.

Chapter Twelve

The blue unmarked police car sat quiet, its motor off. It had not moved since Cam had returned to his place behind the wheel. He had begun to reach for the ignition key, but then withdrew his hand. There was something ..

But what?

There was nothing he could add to his mental message to the woman—if in fact it reached her. He had no way of knowing. His brain ached from the attempt; there was a dull pain in the middle of his forehead close behind his eyes. Harmon had on several occasions tried to explain to him the workings of mental communication, but Cam had not been all that interested. Tonight he wished he'd been more attentive. Those bits and pieces he had remembered were not encouraging.

'You can't *try*, you can't force this thing. It has to come easily, of and by itself. You control it, yes, but it's more of an assistance, a helpful push to something already on its way, not a muscle-power shoving of a stationary thing.'

Can't try. Well, Cam *had* tried—tried to do it the way Harmon had explained. But it was something he'd never tried before, and he felt defeated from the start. It was, after all, a contradiction. How could you try not to try? And yet there was the similarity—at least in the way Harmon had expressed the concept—to some of the Oriental martial arts. In judo or aikido, for example, you did exactly as the professor had advised. You didn't brute-force-shove a stationary object. You gave your helpful push or pull to something already on its way. Cam understood the concept perfectly with regard to combat. But as it related to this kind of thing ...

In the first place, this 'something already on its way'—how did you begin to get it on its way? Especially when the *it* wasn't one of your more simple messages, such as those used in the typical ESP experiments. Transmitting *nine of diamonds* was one thing. But trying to transmit his message was a little different.

Try? No, you weren't supposed to try, dammit.

But he had to do something. So he did it, and now his mind was exhausted from the effort. Which probably meant his message didn't get through. Exhaustion, effort, trying. The three things went together. Even so, there was a point during all this when he thought—no, *felt*—Ktara's presence. As if she was there, in a small corner of his brain, telling him that he'd gotten through to her, that he could stop now, that she would take care of the problem if she could. But Cam couldn't accept it, not completely. He *wanted* to, but that was the whole point. Wishful thinking didn't make it so, and he couldn't be sure that wishful thinking wasn't all it was.

Nonetheless, he had done all he could do on that score. He told himself that now, as he sat behind the wheel of the car. But still there was something

nagging him. Nagging him to the extent that he somehow couldn't turn on the ignition.

What?

What was it he could do here with the car, sitting still, that he couldn't do with it moving? Or was it just that he was plain tired? Sleep was something that he'd not known for—how many hours? His watch said nine-forty-five. No wonder his mind was fatigued. He'd gone without sleeping for more than thirty hours.

But that wasn't it. He was sure that wasn't it. There was something he should be doing, right here and now.

Now, maybe, but *here!* With a horde of leather-winged death on its way to Westhampton—if it wasn't already there? With one crazed old man trying to evade two cops in a dark cave. With another—

The other! As if giving himself a mental nod of agreement, Cam knew that it was the other old man he should be thinking about. The other. Adrian Abelard. Going to plant the bat caller at Westhampton. No, had already done so. Hours ago. After which ...

After which what? He'd be returning to the caves. Was that it? Was the nagging feeling telling Cam that he should go back to the caves and wait for...

No. *Why* it was no, he couldn't say, but it was no. All right. What, then? If in fact the old man right now was heading back toward him, breezing along in Harmon's Cadillac, what—?

Cadillac.

So? Of course it would be the Cadillac. The old man took it, eager for a little joy ride in the big expensive car. So what? What was so damned special about—?

The bug? The follower-unit the cops had placed somewhere on the Cadillac ... was still operational, probably, but so what? The tracer unit—

Was right here in this car!

But Adrian had smashed—

The radio equipment. If he hadn't recognized the scanner for what it was, if he hadn't bothered even to look for it—

Because, unlike the unit Cam had developed, the police unit was smaller. What's more, it was built into the dashboard, unlike Cam's unit which was designed to be transferable from vehicle to vehicle. If—?

It was intact. It was also set to the proper frequency, as Cam discovered as soon as the unit clicked on. He scanned in the proper map setting as indicated by the strength of signal. Then he screwed up his eyebrows. Something didn't make sense.

The Cadillac was moving away from Westhampton, as the hour would dictate. His job there was done. However, it was heading west—southwest, actually, just into the eastern border of Queens on the Long Island Expressway. If he were coming back to the caves, he wouldn't be on that road. He'd be going north on the Cross Island Parkway with the idea of

crossing the water by the Throggs Neck or Whitestone bridges, or he'd be-

No. That was the direct route, the only one. Which meant that the old man didn't know where he was going ...

Check that. He made it to Westhampton, presumably, and knew where he was going then well enough. Therefore he knew where he was going now. Which was where?

There really was only one plausible answer. Manhattan. The Expressway would bring him into the island through the Midtown Tunnel. Forty-Second Street.

The United Nations? Again? Possibly. But there was another possibility. Once in Manhattan, it was a short distance north to the Eighties.

And to Gracie Mansion.

Cam's fingers gripped the key in the ignition. This time there was no nagging thought in his mind holding them back.

Harmon had just locked the elevator controls into their first-floor position when the crashing of glass exploded in his ears.

It came from the study just down the hallway, where the two great glass windows flanked the stone hearth. After his first, nerve-freezing reaction, his right hand darted under the seat of the wheelchair. When it returned to his side it held a snub-nosed Colt Cobra, a weapon he'd laughed about when, months ago, Cam insisted it be clipped to the chair underside, a weapon he'd never used, but one which he now steadied before him as he wondered what would come into its sights.

He didn't wonder long.

Three of them, with shrieking battle cries, soared into the hallway—and came straight at the man in the wheelchair. The little gun barked twice, missed twice, and then the hand which held it was snapped upward as both arms shielded the professor's face. He'd seen those sharp sheaths before, and knew from Cam as to what they could do. But before he buried his eyes into his arms, he saw that more of the creatures were screaming into the hall from the study. Five, ten—but this was no time to count. He had to act, but act *how*? How could he even begin to think straight with the biting, clawing fury all about him? But he must, if he was to survive—if he was going to do anything other than accept his death passively. Harmon steeled himself. *That* he would not do!

Some ten feet behind him now was the open door of the elevator. If he could get inside and then close the door—

Maybe, but first he would have to wheel himself across that ten feet. And to do that, he would have to use his hands—hands which, if he lowered them, would leave his face and throat open targets for the teeth and silver claws which even now were tearing systematically into the back of his head and shoulders, stinging his arms with a thousand wounds, gnawing at his fingers so that it seemed the flesh was being stripped from the bones, so that he could hardly hold his grip on the revolver which—

The revolver. Cam, in telling of his battle with these creatures, had said that he'd gained a momentary respite by—

With an agony of movement that Harmon would not have suspected could accompany such an easy task, his thumb brought back the Cobra hammer to where it caught. Then, making sure that the barrel was pointed away from any part of his body, he pulled the trigger.

The detonation, so close to his ears, sounded as if he was in the center of an avalanche. But other sounds came through—the higher-pitched shrieks of his attackers and the beating of wings in momentary retreat, the pounding of something against wood, and a voice, Navarre's:

'Harmon—*what the hell is happening out there?*'

Again, for good measure, Harmon fired the pistol. Then, well aware of what he risked if he had miscalculated, he thrust his hands down to the wheel-rims, his head jerking back to be sure of his target. It was less than ten feet from him, less than he'd thought. Even so, he recognized the really important fact:

He wasn't going to make it.

Like fighter planes the two killers descended. Whipping his gun up to intercept, he fired one shot, another miss which served to scatter the two but nothing more. He had but one bullet left—and that wasn't enough to get him back to where he had to go.

'*Harmon—do you hear me?*'

Navarre's bellowing and his door-pounding were serving a purpose as well. Some ten of the creatures were now attacking the thick wooden separator, trying to smash their way through. Even so, those left to concentrate on Harmon were double, maybe triple that number.

One shot left. There was, of course, the complete coward's way out. But Harmon had lived his life his own way, and that hadn't ever included the way of the coward. *Damned if I begin at this late date!*

As they came in on him again, he fired his last bullet, then buried his face and throat in his arms. There was a respite of no more than a couple of heartbeats. Then the hacking, clawing, biting began in earnest.

Motionless he sat, doubled over, listening to the cries of attack and the leathery wings beating a dunning tattoo in the blackness around him—feeling the tiny cuts and tears lance into his flesh until it seemed there was no possible new area however small which hadn't received its share of pain. But wrong. Moment followed moment and with the passing of each, new wounds opened.

It was as if his entire body was covered with flesh-eating ants, the kind that devoured all living tissue in its path. A cruel instance of Nature run amok, an animal kingdom version of the most sophisticated Chinese torture. An incessant attack on all of the body's nerve-endings, to which there was only one eventual response of the most hardy mind: refuge in insanity.

No. This too was the coward's way out. Harmon would not take it, if he could help it. *If* he could help it.

But could he? Was there anything he could do—*anything*? Even now the sounds that surrounded him seemed to be losing their individual identities, to blend in one rushing roar. The attacks on his body were no longer felt as individual assaults, but instead seemed to merge into one burning festering disease like a creeping leprosy which now could be felt in all its agony, and then suddenly could not be felt at all. There was another technique of torture developed in the Orient of which Harmon knew of. It consisted of placing a man in a room which was soundless and absolutely black, placing him there so that he could not move. The man could see nothing, hear nothing, feel nothing. Absolutely no sensory perception reached his mind. And the mind snapped under the strain. Harmon now imagined himself within such a room as, with a sudden clarity, he realized that the steady sound had turned to no-sound and that the flesh of his body had become numb to the pain which, moments before, had been close to the maximum point of his endurance.

Had the point of endurance passed? Had his will collapsed? *Am I a goddamned jellyfish*? But by asking the question, he knew he was not. And with the knowledge came a determination. He was not going to accept his death passively. Futile though it might be, he was going to fight back!

With a roar of defiance, he arced his right arm away from its protective placement, his hand finger-spread, then closed with a crunch as it met with the thin membrane of batwing. Downward the arc continued until Harmon could feel the impact of bat body smashing against the spokes of the wheel at his side.

And now the universe was alive again. Where he had exposed new targets of flesh, they were there. He felt, he heard—and, opening his eyes quickly, he saw. He had planned to quickly close his eyes again, but he didn't. Because he didn't quite believe what he saw.

They were not attacking him now.

They moved their wings slightly, suspended in the air around him, none closer than five feet. All faced toward him, as if poised for one final rush of assault, one last, crushing smothering Of this human being they had come to kill. And it seemed that they all were waiting for some kind of signal from one of their number. One who was closer to Harmon than the others, one with a red mark on its forehead.

Slowly, cautiously, his hand moved to the rims of the wheels. As contact was made, he began to put pressure forward, noting with a glance that the backs of his wrists and hands looked as if they'd just clawed their way out of a grave. A dead man's hands, they were, and so they might be yet. If, however, he could edge himself backward toward that elevator ...

Very carefully he pushed off, moving the chair no more than an inch. But the small distance had been crossed noiselessly—and with no reaction from the bats. Still they hung in the air, watching him, the leader among them seeming to stare from its red-bullet eyes through him, past him to something which was behind, beyond.

Another push, this one for a longer time, this one resulting in a five- or six-inch decrease in the distance from chair to elevator. Again, no reaction from the winged killers. And then came the banging again.

'Harmon! For God's sake, if you're out there, answer me!'

In quick succession three things happened.

Harmon pushed off hell for leather.

The leader-bat screamed a command which left little doubt as to its import.

And the bat horde moved. Moved, but not at Harmon. Over the wild shriek of the red-marked leader, they shifted direction and, in one body of flight, left the hallway for the study.

The hall was empty of them. All but the leader which now frantically was screaming, its wings flapping furiously. And then there was another addition to the hallway.

There was a flapping of wings, a large pair coming from within the study. Harmon had time just to catch sight of them before they disappeared, seeming to melt into a black shadow formed by the archway which separated the two areas. Then the great black shadow seemed to detach itself from where it had been. A shadow with a form, a shadow with two burning eyes.

'It is fortunate I have arrived in time,' Count Dracula said somberly.

The electric energy flooding the room was staggering. Harmon had no power of his own now to move what had become leaden hands on permanently rooted wheels. Somehow he was drained, and yet he knew that he was but a bystander to the main contestants in this power battle of wills.

Vampire and vampire bat now faced each other, neither moving. Yet the mind of Dracula poured out commands. Harmon could feel the weight of them as they tore through the air past their target and slammed into his own brain. The substance of the messages was not clear, other than that they were commands to obey and that their power was increasing with each moment.

And then the tension was broken. The killer bat seemed to shrug off the hold placed upon it. And, with an ear-piercing scream of hate, he attacked the black figure with the flaming red eyes.

The eyes grew brighter, a hand lifted toward the swooping creature, a solitary finger pointed. And then the great bat burst into a pale green glowing flame.

Shrieking, clawing at itself, the creature stopped its forward movement. The pointed finger and the eyes of the Count followed the bat as it veered from side to side and then fell downward to the polished wood floor. For a moment its green phosphorescence glowed bright. Then the flame was gone. Where the killer bat had been, there was but a fine gray ash.

The fire in the Count's eyes paled.

'I did not wish this,' he said. *'But the control of this one could be accomplished in no other way.'*

Harmon's voice was grim. *'I do not share your sorrow, Count Dracula. The value you place upon the life of a creature like that—'*

‘Ts higher, much higher than that I place on yours, for example?’ The Count laughed. ‘That is true, Professor, and yet I have saved your life—traded this my little brother’s life for yours.’

‘Because you had little choice.’

‘That is correct. If your life stopped, mine would too—your clever implants which keep our states in tandem.’ Dracula’s eyes turned toward the door to the basement. ‘The man on the other side is silent now. He hears our voices and is afraid. He has reason to be afraid, as it is his veins which will afford me with a most welcome blood-meal.’

‘No,’ Harmon replied. ‘He must not be killed.’

But the face of the vampire had begun its transformation. The teeth, now extended to their full growth, reflected cruelly the light which shone upon them.

‘I said no,’ Harmon repeated. ‘He is not the master of the bats.’

The speech of Dracula was sibilant. ‘Of that I am aware, Professor. But he is an enemy of yours, is he not?’

‘Nonetheless, he is the law. We will deal with him in another way. Do you hear me, Count?’

The vampire gave no signal, either of understanding or of compliance. He moved to the great door, unbolted and opened it. ‘Come,’ he said into the opening. ‘Come out of there. That is my command, you will obey.’

It was with the blank expression of a deep trance that Navarre lumbered through the opening, his service revolver dangling by its trigger guard from the index finger of his right hand. As he approached the Count, he stopped, docilely awaiting whatever was to come.

‘You have entered this house,’ Dracula said. ‘You have entered it unbidden. Why have you done so?’

Navarre’s staring eyes did not blink. His lips moved mechanically.

‘T-to find out ...’

‘And what is it that you have found out?’

‘Blood. There was blood. And a coffin ... with dirt.’

‘And do you know what that signifies?’

‘No. Yes. I think—I thought—they don’t... aren’t real.’

‘You mean *vampires*?’

‘Yes, vampires.’

‘But now you know better, is that not correct?’

‘Yes.’

‘You suspect that I am a vampire.’

‘Yes.’

The Count’s eyes glinted as they turned to Harmon. ‘Well, Professor. What is your decision? Although, as you know, the term *vampire* is one I regard as being incorrect as regards myself, this man and those he would tell of his suspicions would not make distinctions which they would view as mere splitting of hairs.’

Harmon nodded. 'I quite agree, Count. But he shall not be killed. You have the ability to take his knowledge from him without otherwise harming his person. That is what you will do.'

I would have his blood!

'Attempt to take it, and I shall do by willpower what you prevented the bats from doing. It is an easy thing for me to move the lever which will drive the tiny sliver through—'

'One day, Harmon—'

'But that day is not today, Count Dracula. In the meantime, I would ask Detective Navarre a question or two.'

The Count's facial features softened. 'Ask.'

Within the following minutes, Harmon had the full picture—including the fact that his telephone wires had been cut. 'Very well. Count?'

It was quick, the instructions directly to the point. Navarre would forget all he had seen in the basement. He would leave the house immediately and get into his car. He would drive from the manor and not remember anything at all once he drove onto the expressway.

'But before you leave, there is one thing you will do,' Harmon interrupted. 'You will restore the telephone lines to service.' In spite of the pain which now was making itself felt all over his body, the professor chuckled. 'Repair service is not easily come by these days.'

The Count failed to appreciate the humor. 'I have wasted enough time here.' He moved to leave.

'The other bats?' Harmon asked.

'I shall not slay them, Professor. It is human blood I crave, and I shall have it. But they—my little brothers—shall help me in my quest.'

Harmon's voice had a warning edge. 'Count—'

'Tend to your wounds, Professor. I shall be tending to him who caused them.'

As the blue car swung onto the Thruway south toward New York City, Cam's attention returned to the spotter flash on the dashboard.

What's he up to now? It was very odd. He had been watching the spot's progress west along the Long Island Expressway. When it passed the junction of that highway and the north south running Clearview Expressway, which like the Cross Island could have brought the Cadillac to either of the two bridges on the direct route north, he knew his surmise about Abelard's heading into Manhattan was correct. But suddenly the flashing light left the Expressway's track and was moving due south, and then just as suddenly it was motionless. The car had halted.

Why? The area was Cunningham Park, one of several patches of green on this part of the island. Why in blazes would the old man be stopping there?

And, more immediate, should Cam alter his course to place himself on Long Island between the Cadillac and Manhattan? If he did, if he moved eastward to take the Triboro Bridge into Queens, he could wind up in left field

—if the Cadillac again moved west at a fast pace. But the moment for decision was not yet; that would come some miles to the south. And by then he would have a better idea of the pacing—whether the big limousine moved or not.

But Cunningham Park. What could the old man possibly be doing there?

BARBERSHOP HARMONY GETS CLOSE SHAVE

In the rear seat of the limousine, Adrian Abelard read the *Newsday* headline with bright and eager eyes. The story under the head had to do with a spotlight falling onto a makeshift stage at a volunteer firehouse during a benefit show consisting of amateur talent, one unit of which was a barbershop quartet doing its thing when the mishap took place. But Adrian Abelard was not at all interested in the story, did not in fact bother to glance past the headline. It was the word HARMONY that attracted him—and his scissors.

The rear of the Cadillac was littered with magazines and newspapers. He had bought them, with the scissors, rubber cement and a tablet of lined paper, at a drugstore in Westhampton. On the front seat was the open tablet, with a number of single words, cut individually mostly from headlines, laid out in their desired order.

All but the last letter in HARMONY was clipped and placed on the tablet. The word ARM was wadded up and discarded. Adrian had been scanning the headlines for MONEY and an H, but with this stroke of fortune he no longer needed to prolong the hunt.

Now the pasting of the words onto the top sheet of tablet paper began. It was a job which took him ten minutes, but he was in no hurry. There was no reason to hurry. When he was finished, he held the completed piece of art up to the interior rear-seat light. His lips curled into a smile of satisfaction. The message was terse, but that was appropriate to a man who meant business.

crossing ME has Killed HARMON of *Westhampton*
and WILL cost YOU \$500,000 more. Leave At
Same PLACE *tomorrow* night, just as before.
5 bundles ON *dock* IN park, or else.

It would do very nicely. He had considered telephoning his message to the mayor's office as he had done before, but this seemed the better way. It added a touch of the macabre to the whole thing. Again he nodded, satisfied with himself. He had thought of demanding another million, but decided against it. Half that amount would do. When added to the million he already had, that would be quite enough for himself and August.

Poor August. All these years working, and not knowing really what he was working toward. But he had done the work well, so well. All it had required was the additional bits of training which Adrian had supplied.

And the little ones. They too had performed with excellence. It was a pity that they would have to be destroyed. But nonetheless it was necessary. August would not like that part of it, but he would not know about it until

afterward, after the deed was done. August's little ones. Filthy creatures, really. Filthy and disgusting. And dangerous. He already had decided how he would kill them. It would be by fire. He would hole them up within the caves, then pour kerosene all over everything including them. Then he would take those kerosene lamps and ...

He wrung his hands in pleasure. He could see with his mind's eye the little abominable death merchants going up in flames, screaming their death cries as like flying torches they burnt themselves out.

Carefully now he gathered up the leftovers from his cuttings, making certain he had every one. You always had to be careful about little details, he knew that. Opening the door of the car, he stepped out, his hands full of paper which he took to the large barrel placed in the park for refuse. Into the barrel went the magazines and newspapers—and the scissors and rubber cement as well. As he turned and walked back to the limousine, he stopped and looked at it admiringly. It was a beautiful automobile. He'd never driven anything like it before. So nice and quiet, so very comfortable. You felt like a king—or, better, a captain of a large ocean-going ship. Again, it was too bad that he would have to get rid of it. Cars had markings. Numbers on their engines and other places too, in addition to the license plates. He would hide the thing in the hills somewhere and be very careful to wipe off all the prints. Tomorrow. When he and August left the cabin the following day, they would leave in the old truck. Just two old men in a broken-down old truck. Who would suspect that they had one and a half million dollars in the back of that old truck?

He closed the rear door and opened the one wheel side. As he sat on the plush leather, he looked again at the completed note. It was a work of art. He could almost feel the magic in it. But why should there not be magic associated with it? Abelard the Great had composed it, created it—and it was a magical feat to end all magical feats. How many other magicians could turn such a simple piece of paper into all those dollars?

Abelard the Great, indeed!

He started the engine of the powerful automobile and turned on the lights. Suddenly he felt tired. But why should he not be tired? He was not a young man anymore. Even so, there was more work to do tonight, and he'd best get about doing it. There would be the leaving of the note—just how he would do that he didn't yet know, but he would think of something by the time he was into Manhattan. And then, afterward, he would have to do something with the three prisoners he had trussed up in the cave. No, *he* wouldn't have to do anything. The bats would take care of the job.

He shuddered. It would be the first time he would actually witness their killing of men. He had used rabbits and other small animals when training the creatures. Even then, the blood and the screaming had bothered him. He also wondered how August would take it, but that could be handled. He could arrange it so that August need not see the proceedings at all. That probably would be best. Yes, August would not see the killing of the three men tonight,

and he would not see the killing of his creatures after they had returned to the caves with the money tomorrow night.

Placing the gear shift in Drive, he guided the car from the rest area out onto the road which would take him back onto the Expressway. Again he shuddered. It was a strange feeling that was coming over him. Probably because he had been thinking about the killing of the bats. Killing the killers. Somehow he felt that they would know what he was going to do, that they would fight back...

Ridiculous. They were nothing but lower-level animals, that's all. They had been trained to do some specific things. They had done them. Tonight as in the past nights they had been ordered to kill and they had no doubt done so. Even now they would be winging their way back north, resting at the appointed place near Ossining, then just before dawn they would return to the caves. They could do nothing other than what they had been commanded to do. Yet...

Sometimes, when they thought he wasn't looking at them, their eyes would turn toward him with a malevolent—

Imagination. That's all it was. Yet ... when he had taken the sheaths off them, when he had tried to clean the blood from them so that August wouldn't know...

They had cut him more than once. Not serious cuts, but he suspected that they had not been accidental. And the one he had trained to lead, the one he had named Spartacus ... he had the eyes of pure evil. He? *It!* The thing was nothing more than a mindless creature which he himself had molded into an instrument of death. Why should he now begin to think anything different?

It was the night, the darkness; that's what it was. The way the trees in the park seemed to block out the light of the moon, the way they seemed to swallow the brightness of the car's headlamps, their branches seeming to stretch out for him, to trap him in their tangles, to grasp, then choke—

And then, with the sharp thorns they concealed within their branches, rake into his eyes and gouge them from their sockets—

'No!' he protested, lifting his hands from the wheel and placing them over his eyes. The lurching car brought his mind back to present reality and brought his hands back where they belonged. But even in the coolness of the night air, those hands were wet with the same beads of perspiration which now covered his brow and were streaming into and stinging his eyes.

He wiped them with the fingers of one hand. Soon, he told himself, he would be out of this dark place. Soon he would be back onto the highway where the eerie feeling that had gripped him would be left behind. Soon—

His foot slammed onto the brake, the sound of rubber burning behind him. *Good God!* His mind really was playing tricks on him now. Panting, he tried to clear his brain. Forcing himself to look up again and through the windshield, he saw that it was no longer there—that thing he saw only moments before, or *thought* he saw:

That giant bat which had swooped down and flew over the hood of the car. Obviously another hallucination. But it had looked so real. Yet, how could it be? There were no bats of that size in this region—none that he did not control. And the ones he controlled were by this time far from here, weren't they?

Weren't they?

Lord—they *weren't!*

Instantly he heard the shrill cries of the horde above him, through the closed glass and steel which protected him. Then he saw them, to the front, to the sides, to the rear. With wild eyes and gaping mouth he churned his head every which way, and every which way he looked they were there—out there, circling the car, coming ever closer, and now—

And now thumping against the glass and metal barrier, their sharp talons shining silvery in the natural and unnatural night!

Outside, all of them! But he was inside—and the car motor still was running. He could escape them, he *would* escape them!

His foot moved from brake to accelerator, but in its downward motion it stopped. His eyes wide now, like perfectly round white circles, Adrian Abelard stared out the glass before him, his orbs transfixed on something some five yards ahead.

It was a man! A large man with huge shoulders wrapped in a cape of black. A man with a mocking face and eyes which commanded ...

Without knowing why, he shifted into Park and turned off the ignition. Then he opened the door and stepped from the car.

The big man's eyes burned into his own. He wanted to yank free his focus, to see what had become of the bats, if they now were making ready to attack him. Then, as if the other man had read his thoughts, he was allowed the release. He looked around him.

They were everywhere. None were flying, but all around him they were perched. On the pavement, on the grass, completely covering the hood and top and trunk of the long limousine. They made no sound. Still as statues, they all faced toward him, watching him with eyes of fire. Eyes like those of the man...

And he himself could not move. It was as if he were frozen to the spot. As for the other—

'Tonight is your end,' said the mocking voice. 'You who have turned these my brothers into killers, you have made them slaves, you must pay for this affront.'

'I—'

'You wish to speak. Speak, then.'

At once he found he had the ability to do so. 'It was not me. My brother, he—'

'I know of your brother, Adrian Abelard.'

'You know my name?'

‘Yours and that of your brother. I know what he has done to my little ones, and I know what you have done.’

‘*Your—*’

‘My little ones. But I see you require proof of this. Very well, you shall have it.’ The man in black lifted a finger toward Adrian Abelard, but his voice was directed to the horde.

‘Him. You may have him now!’

Adrian Abelard’s scream was smothered in the sounds of attack cries and beating wings. And then it was cutting, slicing, beating, swirling hell in which he was immersed, the hell in which so many others had found themselves because of his doing. The hell of death by slow, agonizing degrees. Adrian screamed bloody murder and attempted to shield his eyes from the onslaught, but he knew it was only a matter of time before—

And then, as suddenly as it had begun, the attack was over. Daring to peer between laced fingers, Adrian saw the bats were again resting all around him.

And then he saw the man in black again.

And the eyes that flashed red, eyes which held his like vises.

Adrian’s body trembled as he realized that once more he could no longer control any of his own movements, and as he realized that the mocking aristocratic face was now but inches from his own.

‘It is my wish to kill, you, Adrian Abelard. Do you wish to die at this time?’

‘N-no.’

‘That is understandable, but it is the way of the world that when my wishes do not correspond with the wishes of others, it is my wishes which prevail. You shall die this night, Adrian Abelard. However, there is the matter of means. Would you prefer that I summon your little killers to perform the task? They are most efficient, as you know.’

‘N-no.’

‘I’m sorry. I’m not sure I heard your response.’

‘*No!*’ Please, no. Anything but that.’

‘Anything,’ a sardonic voice repeated. ‘There are in the wide universe a great many anythings, Adrian Abelard. Shall I grant you your request? I wonder.’ A cruel smile. ‘I really wonder if you would prefer what I have in mind. Let us see.’

Again the body of Adrian shuddered. The voice of the other man cut clean through him to the pit of his stomach. But it was more than just the voice. The face before him was changing!

The sleek black hair was moving down the high-arched forehead. The nostrils of what had been an aquiline nose were flattening, and the lips were drawing back from teeth which were no longer those of a human being but more like the fangs of some savage meat-tearing animal. And those eyes that had flashed red now were totally so, except for the very centers which were tiny pin-points of white searing heat.

And then strong hands were upon his 'shoulders, bending him backward as the white eye-suns dipped below the range of vision and—

Something sliced through his throat!

He cried out, but it was a silent cry. There was no sound, none at all. Time itself, the clouds above, stood stock still. As if the world had turned into a moon-white icescape. So cold, so terribly cold. His feet were frozen to the point he could no longer feel them, then his ankles, his shins. It was as if he were being drained of the heat of life itself.

And then he knew that this was precisely the case.

He was going to die. He was going to die by the slow, agonizing extraction of the fluid of life. He was—

Wrong.

Suddenly he was again upright, his eyes looking into the foully blood-smearred lips and teeth of the unholy beast with the deadly eyes. Suddenly the blood which remained within him began to redistribute itself, to flow into the extremities from which he had thought all had been taken forever, never to be restored. And suddenly he heard the thick voice of the other, not fully comprehending all that it was saying, but knowing that commands were being given him and knowing that he would obey. He could, however, grasp part of it—a message he received joyously:

'We do not all have our wishes granted to us all the time, Adrian Abelard. It appears your time to die has not yet come.'

Chapter Thirteen

For Cam, the race began as he was approaching the Nyack exit from Route 87, when he first noticed that the white blip representing the Cadillac was moving again. West on the Long Island Expressway—toward Manhattan.

His foot pushed the accelerator to the floor. There was a chance—a very slim chance—that he could reach Gracie Mansion before the other car. His car was almost twice as far from target as the other, but if he pushed it, really pushed it, and the old man in the Cadillac didn't...

And it looked as though he wasn't going to. In fact, Cam estimated the limousine's speed at under forty miles per. The blue police car's speedometer was hanging in around seventy-five-eighty. If speed was the main consideration, Cam would get there first.

Speed was not the main consideration.

Toll booths were. Not the booths themselves—Cam had a pocket full of change for just such a purpose for the previous night—but the lines of cars at the two booths which separated him from his objective. Even if he'd wanted to, the jam of vehicles left him no room to maneuver his way to run the booths. And he didn't want to, due to the police squad cars parked off to the side. To get picked up now would be all he needed.

So he sat and fumed as he watched the little white blip move steadily across Queens, then over into Manhattan, then up the East River Drive.

Cam hit the northern end of the F.D.R. Drive going seventy and accelerating. The turn-off markings sped by—One Fifty-Fifth, One Forty-Fifth, One Thirtieth—as on his spotter the Cadillac crept northward parallel to the Sixties, then to the Seventies.

Cam's car was passing One Hundred-Tenth Street when the Cadillac stopped. There was no doubt about it. The blip stabilized only a block south of the mayor's residence.

It took him ten minutes to find the car itself, parked beneath the branches of a low-limbed tree. Flinging himself out of the blue car, he approached the Cadillac door at a run, yanking it open. Empty, the keys in the ignition. His eyes turned north toward the mansion. The lights about the place told him what he'd find there. Fortunately, among the first things he found after closing the distance was a familiar face. Ktara's.

'Proctor—where is he?' he demanded.

'He's busy.' He did not like the way she looked at him. There was the unmistakable taint of amusement in the eyes, on her lips.

'Busy where?' he pushed.

She smiled fully. 'He's inside. On the telephone with Professor Harmon, I believe.'

'... been trying to get you since we got the message—'

'The phone was out of order, Sandy, but it's all right now. Everything is all

right, or soon will be.'

'But they were after *you*, Damien. What happened?'

'They didn't get me. Obviously. They're gone now. That's really why I called, Sandy. You see—'

'Well, then, I guess this closes the business. We've got the other brother surrounded. Oh—you do know there are two brothers, I suppose.'

'No, not really all of it. I—'

'Well, anyway, there are. Like I said, we've got one of them surrounded. He's in the caves hiding, and that's how he can stay for the time being. We figure the second one—he's the' one who's got your car, by the way—will head back there. And that's what we're going to let him do. A very quiet stake-out, very unobtrusive. So, no problem. Your man Sanchez was very helpful, Damien. He—'

'You've heard from Cam?'

'Er, no. Actually, we may have to smooth a couple of raw police nerves. Seems he stole an official car in an effort to get to you; at least, that's how I imagine it went. Anyway, I'm glad I got through to you. Now I can call off all this business here,'

'Don't do that, Sandy. The bats—they're on their way.'

A pause. 'A double target. You *and* the mayor?'

'Not exactly. But don't call off your preparations. The bat horde *is* coming, but this shouldn't present you with any problem. And that is because—'

'*No!* You don't understand. He's brought them here so that they will die! Don't kill them, don't—'

But the shooting had begun.

It was an amazing sight, an unbelievable sight. With each and every shot, the sharpshooters brought down their targets. No misses, because the targets were not at all difficult to hit.

Because they were not moving targets.

They simply hung there in the sky, motionless, their formation resembling nothing as much as a number of lines of targets within a carnival shooting range booth. The phrase, *shooting fish in a barrel*, occurred to Cam, but it wasn't really appropriate.

This was easier!

Cam turned to look for Ktara. Sure enough, she was no more than five yards from him, her face toward the sky. Even from this distance he could see the white flashings emanate from her eyes. It was through her power that the bat horde was being held stationary, he had no doubt.

Now, tonight, she had come through.

Two night's previously, however...

He did not understand, maybe would never understand. This woman of age beyond age. How could any man of his experience hope to understand her?

The gunfire continued. The bats continued to drop from the sky, brought down by riflemen who perhaps couldn't believe their good fortune but

nevertheless were determined to take every advantage of it while it lasted. Sanford Proctor was among those whose open mouths and uncomprehending eyes stared upward. And next to him—

Adrian Abelard laughed. It was an hysterical, insane laugh.

‘I brought my note for the mayor ... I brought it here ... but you’re killing my creatures. *You’re killing them!*’

And now his laughs were punctuated by a sobbing. ‘You think you’ll get them all? Yes ... get them *all*. I know what he has in mind for me ... I know. He wants to *eeeeaaaaauuuuuuugghhhhhh!*’

Where the lone bat came from was anybody’s guess. With such perfect targets dotting the northern sky, no one seemed to bother much with searching out the other direction, where at least one of the warrior creatures had been lurking. Now like an arrow it had shot downward. Abelard had seen it, and at the final instant so had Cam. Or, rather, he had seen the silvery glinting reflection of the sharp sheaths to the front of the bat’s wings. Adrian Abelard must have seen them too. In fact, he no doubt got a very close look just before he screamed.

Just before the two sheaths slammed into his eyeballs.

With desperate strength the bat master jerked free his arms from the policemen who were holding him, who themselves were taken completely by surprise by the lone creature’s attack. Before they had a chance to regain themselves, Cam’s right hand shot out and closed around the killer’s body, yanking it from its victim. As the scythe like sheaths pulled clear, Cam saw that they were blooded to their full lengths. The old man fell onto his back, his sliced eyeballs pushed halfway back into his pierced brain.

The bat Cam clutched shrieked a sharp victory cry—which ended abruptly as he tore its body neatly into two sections. As the two parts of the marauder fell to the pavement, Cam realized the night suddenly had become quiet. As quiet as a tomb.

‘That’s all of them, sir,’ said the voice which broke the silence. It was a plainclothesman reporting to Proctor. ‘We’ve got them all.’

Proctor did not answer immediately. His eyes were still focused to the north.

‘You got them all, Lieutenant? Then what, may I ask you, is *that*?’

When the others looked where Proctor had been looking they saw that *that* was one of the killer bats they had not taken care of. Except that this one looked ... well, somewhat larger than the others. In any case, it was streaking away from them.

The lieutenant found a measure of comfort in that. ‘No threat to us at all, sir. Although we could have gotten him too—we could have taken care of them all that much faster—if we’d had the flamethrowers.’

‘Which reminds me,’ Cam said.

‘I beg your pardon?’ Proctor replied.

‘No, sir, not you. There’s somebody else I’ve got to ask about that.’

The someone else was Ktara. He asked her. Her smile seemed genuine.

‘It’s very simple, Mr. Sanchez. Although you seem to think otherwise, there are certain things over which I do not have complete control. One of them is my own list of limitations, two of which concern what I can and cannot do when in the presence—the very close proximity—to water and fire. The—’

‘One moment, Damien.’ Proctor held his hand over the phone to listen to the report of the uniformed sergeant who had just rushed into the room. Grimly he snapped the phone to speaking position.

‘Damien, you were right about one thing. The bats are here. I trust you are right about the second part—that they’ll be no problem.’

‘Sandy! Will you listen to—’

But the phone was on its receiver, and Proctor on his way outside.

Cam had made it to the front of the mansion when the cries to his left sounded. There they were, the great bat horde, high to the north and moving in.

‘Sanchez!’

‘Mr. Proctor—’

‘Good to see that you’re all right. I think Damien was concerned about you.’

‘You... spoke to the professor?’

‘Just now. He says the bats attacked him, but failed. Ah, so *there* they are!’

Both men moved from where they were, Proctor to begin issuing orders, Cam to locate Ktara. She wasn’t hard to find.

‘You could have told me. That Harmon was alive, that my message got through.’

‘I could have,’ she agreed. ‘But you didn’t seem interested. You seemed to have your mind already made up regarding myself and my motives. Also you seemed to have things of your own you wanted to do.’

‘We’re all going to have things to do,’ he said, looking up into the northern sky. ‘Real soon now.’

The horde was moving fast, grouped in what looked to be a single arrowhead formation, closed tightly behind the leader. Cam was impressed by the calmness of the men who waited on the rooftop of the mansion as well as on the ground. In all, as he walked to where Proctor now stood, he counted more than sixty riflemen. There seemed to be something missing.

‘I don’t see any flamethrowers,’ he said to Proctor.

The large man evidently had completed giving what instructions he had felt were necessary. He was tense—as who wouldn’t be?—but, like the riflemen, he seemed in complete control. In another minute or so all that could change, Cam knew. Proctor hadn’t been up on that UN roof with him, but he’d been on the ground. He’d have to know too that the men’s present calm could turn to a sudden frenzy—might, in fact, if the bats’ attack was as strategically deceptive as the UN fiasco.,

‘The flamethrowers, Mr. Proctor,’ Cam said.

‘Oh, yes. We don’t have any here. Damien said it was important that we not use them. Why, I don’t know. Surely, they were effective against the creatures two nights ago, but—’

Even had Proctor completed what he was going to say, Cam wouldn’t have heard him. His full attention was focused elsewhere. Not on the sky, but directly to his left where, from the thick hedges, a lone man had stumbled out onto the drive and was coming toward them.

A wild-eyed man, babbling deliriously.

Adrian Abelard. But an emaciated, pale, almost skeletal Adrian Abelard, who now stopped ten feet from where Cam stood—and pointed up to the northern sky.

‘Look at them!’ the old man cried. ‘*Look, I say!* My little pets—there they all are, and they’re coming!’

‘Who is that lunatic?’ Proctor muttered.

Cam kept his eyes on Adrian. ‘He’s exactly who he says he is. There’s your master of the bats, Mr. Proctor. Abelard the Great.’

Proctor reacted with a barked order to two uniformed policemen nearby: ‘Arrest that man! Don’t let him get away!’

But getting away was the last thing on Adrian Abelard’s mind. As Cam and Proctor and the two cops moved in on him, he waved a piece of paper.

‘I have a message for the mayor—the mayor himself. If one of you who is in authority here will kindly—’

Simultaneously, the policemen’s hands grasped the frail arms as Proctor grasped the piece of paper. After reading it, he handed the sheet of tablet paper with its word-cuttings to Cam. As the Puerto Rican looked from the message to its author, the old man’s eyes cleared for just an instant.

‘I... know you. Don’t I know... ?’

‘You should,’ Cam replied. ‘But you’re wrong. Professor Harmon isn’t dead.’

‘Isn’t? Isn’t dead? How could that be? Unless the man in black, unless *he* intervened to ... But it doesn’t matter now, does it? No. *They* come now. See them—see how close my beautiful *disgusting friends* come!’

With a scream, the ex-vaudevillian jerked free his arms from the hands that held them. Instantly the holds were restored.

flamethrowers, quite simply, would have cut down on my ability to—’

Cam suddenly understood. ‘Back on that roof two nights ago ... it was only after the flames were out that »you—’

Ktara nodded.

‘Then why, lady, *why in hell didn’t you tell me that?*’

Her green eyes flashed a bright yellow, then cooled.

‘Why? Because, Mr. Sanchez, as I observed to you earlier tonight, you didn’t seem interested. You appeared to have your mind made up already.’

Cam felt there should be something for him to say, but the problem was

how to say it. In any event, he was spared his mental agony by Proctor's voice.

The large man was bent over the fallen Adrian Abelard.

'Good Lord!' he said. 'From the look of those eye wounds—and from the look of the man in general—I'd say he's lost almost three-quarters of his blood. And look here—at the throat.'

Ktara moved to look. When she had, she gave her opinion:

'Those slashes. They could have been caused by the bat which attacked him.'

Proctor's eyes looked up at those of the woman.

'Could have? I'm not so sure. Those metal spikes on the bat's wings went directly to the man's eyes. I'm sure of it.'

'Perhaps, Mr. Proctor. But are you also sure that they didn't enter his throat—when, for example, Mr. Sanchez pulled the creature from this man's face?'

Cam's steel like voice intervened. 'I'm not all that sure they didn't, Mr. Proctor. What I mean is, if I were to be asked for the record, I'd have to say that there was every opportunity—'

Sanford Proctor stood. 'On the other hand, these marks on the neck may be nothing for me to concern myself with. Perhaps they are something which had best be left uninvestigated.'

'Perhaps,' Ktara agreed.

Proctor nodded. 'Yes. In any event, we shall have the other brother in the morning. Do you both have rides back to Westhampton?'

Ktara smiled. 'Yes, Mr. Proctor. We have the station wagon which I drove here—and also the limousine. You'll take that back, Mr. Sanchez?'

Cam said he would. Gladly. Maybe when he got back to the big manor, he would find out all that had happened since his absence.

No, not all. Because all of it hadn't taken place yet.

It wouldn't until the lone bat which had headed north reached its destination—and also returned to Westhampton.

August Abelard laughed, his laugh echoing off the high ceilings and thick walls of the caves. *The fool, those three perfect fools!* They actually thought they had escaped! They wouldn't have—oh, no, they wouldn't have. All he had to do was to step back into the room and shoot them down. He'd seen them struggle to the drawer where the sheaths were, and he'd seen them work to cut themselves loose from their bonds. But why shoot them? Why bother killing them when they could solve his problem for him? Why shoot down the very men who would rush off and take care of Adrian? If they killed him, he wouldn't have to. Otherwise, he *would* have to.

For two reasons.

Adrian had subverted his scientific experiments. He had completely ruined his chances to once again gain respect in the scientific community.

The other reason was even more basic:

August had found the million dollars.

It had been very cleverly hidden but Adrian, after all, didn't know the caves quite as well as he did. Unless, of course, Adrian did find the money and wasn't telling his brother about it.

Would Adrian have killed him for the money? To have all of it? Very difficult to answer. Adrian did think his brother insane. Oh, there was no getting around that. Adrian thought so. That's why, in the beginning, he insisted upon staying here with him. Yes. It was only afterward, when Adrian saw how much August really could do with his genetic manipulation and training that the other idea came to him. That was obvious.

That also was unforgiveable.

To take his creations and to ...

August had feigned agreement in front of the others, but Adrian would have to be punished for what he did. And since he'd used August's bats to kill, so he would himself die. If not by the bats, then by shotgun—or police bullets.

There still was one good thing about what Adrian did. Damien Harmon.

One of *them*, one of the ones who had scoffed at him and his ideas. Well, let's wonder how much scoffing Damien Harmon was doing now.

He wished for the moment that he had a radio he could listen to, so that he might hear if a report were made on the *professor's* death. But the radio was up in the house, and there was no way he could get at it. He knew the police were there, knew that they were all around the place, but he had a plan.

After all, Adrian was coming. At any time now, his brother would be wheeling down the road in his stolen car. And Adrian didn't know about the police. That would prove very deadly for Brother Adrian.

August laughed again. Then, with a sudden look around himself in the blackness, he placed a conspiratorial index finger across his lips.

Silence. Yes. He should be very silent. There was no telling if there was someone else down here with him, one of the policemen who might have sneaked through one of the entrances.

But that wasn't really possible, was it? The main entrance, the one by the side of the house, was so cleverly concealed. They'd never find it.

No, that wasn't right. They knew where it was. That was how they escaped, remember? Yes. It was the *other* way in they didn't know about. He himself hadn't known about that one; that had been Adrian's private thing.

Except that the tall young man, the Spanish-looking one ... that was the way he had come in. *He* knew about it. And if *he* was out there...

Anyway, they wouldn't find him. Hadn't they tried hard enough already? Certainly they had. August remembered that clearly. The flashlights, their calling him, warning him that he was surrounded....

Or was he dreaming that? Lately ...

It was the utter darkness of this place. He was *not* insane, not even approaching insanity! No. Let Adrian think what he wanted to—he was not

going out of his mind. It was simply that for so long his mind had been occupied with this single project. In great men, well-known men, it would be called dedication to an ideal. Put for the likes of himself, for the likes of a man the so-called greats had sneered at, the same dedication is called insanity. The greats!

Abelard the Great. That's what Adrian used to call himself. Adrian. Mocking him in front of those three policemen—or two policemen and that other, Spanish one. Mocking him, saying that it was *he* and not August who had turned the work into something worthwhile. What did that fake magician know of what was and was not worthwhile?

Anyway, it wouldn't matter for long. Adrian would pay for his sin. When the bullets of those police guns ripped through his body—

And the little ones, what of them? What of those perfect specimens resulting from the expert manipulation of Science and Nature which Adrian had ruined?

In the darkness, in the cleft of rock in which he hid, August Abelard considered the problem.

His creatures. His creations. They could not be exhibited in public now. Not ever. The use to which they had been put was known by the authorities. His own scientific genius would never be known now. *Blast Adrian!* Blast his meddling, blast his tinkering which, really, had been no more than adding another signal or two to those already taught August's creatures. That was all he did, really.

That was all he did.

All.

Which meant that—

Of course. What Adrian had done, so August could do. If the bat horde was useless to prove his scientific genius, he could use it just as Adrian had.

To kill. Or, rather, not to kill but instead to extract payment upon the threat of killing. New York obviously wasn't the place to work anymore. But if he got himself and his bats and his million dollars out of here, and if he set himself up in another location ...

But where?

Of course.

Washington, D.C. Very excellent place for the type of extortion he had in mind. Extortion? Was that the right word? Adrian probably would know, but then Adrian wouldn't be along. He suddenly realized he would probably never see his brother alive again. Perhaps he should try to warn—

No! Adrian deserved to die. Just as Harmon deserved to die. Harmon? There were others, too. Others who, with Harmon, had used their influence to hurt him. Well, he would hurt them as well. All of them. All he'd have to do was to wait until the bats came back. Then he would give them their instructions. They liked him, liked him much better than they ever liked Adrian. Yes, they would obey him. He would get them ready. Then when the

police attacked Adrian and had killed him, *he*

would send his little creatures to attack the police. And while they were doing so, he would make his escape, with the money. It was all very clear to him, so very clear.

Why, then, did he feel suddenly so cold? A chill? The caves were cold and damp, yes, but he had spent much time within them. It shouldn't bother him at all, unless at his age he was being touched by arthritis or—

No, he was in excellent health—of body *and* mind. In which case, what was it? Ah! A sound—from the secret entrance to the cave. Adrian's secret entrance.

The flapping of wings.

Soon, soon, soon. The bats were coming. And Adrian too would be coming.

'Your bats are not coming, August Abelard. They and your brother are dead.'

Chapter Fourteen

‘Who—who is here? Who is here with me? Who reads my mind?’

The foreign-sounding voice spoke again:

‘I have no mind-reading powers, August Abelard. I merely thought you would be interested in the fate of those little ones you subverted—and to him who was your relative ... *by blood*.’

August Abelard considered turning on his flashlight. No, that would give his position away. But there was something in the manner in which the voice in the darkness had pronounced the word *blood*...

‘Are you police?’

A harsh laugh. No other answer. But again the chill within his bones, as if his very blood was turning cold. His very ... blood.

There had been the beating of wings!

‘Who—?’

‘Does it matter who? What matters is that your brother is dead, just as are my brothers. My little brothers whose deaths I allowed because they had been tampered with to the point of mindlessness. I hold you accountable for that, August Abelard. And I have come to extract my payment.’

The flashlight snapped on.

August Abelard screamed. The light fell to the stone, but was angled still to illuminate—

That face! The eyes and teeth, stained with—*blood*!

The lips curled back into a smile.

‘See now what you have brought upon yourself, August Abelard. See what kind of death it is you have chosen and accept it with grace. For however you accept it, it is here.’

‘You ... you’re a *vampire*.’ It was said with a strange tone—not of fear, but of respect. Of interested respect.

Count Dracula tilted his head slightly. ‘And if that were true?’

‘Then ... then if you take my blood, if you mingle your blood with mine, I too—’

‘You have done research on the subject?’ An amused voice now.

‘Yes—much research!’ Excitedly. ‘Scores, hundreds of legends, from every part of the world. I know much about the vampire.’

A deep booming laugh, one which brought back the death chill to the scientist.

‘The problem with legends, August Abelard, is that they speak much of truth, but also contain a measure of misinformation. As for the possibility of your becoming like myself—’

‘This does not happen?’

‘It is possible for it to happen, but only if I choose it to be so. In your case, I do not so choose.’

August Abelard fell upon his knees, raising his clasped hands to his uplifted face.

‘Please! Please, Master. Make me as you are! I’ve a million dollars, Master—a million! But I am old. I want immortality as well—the immortality you can grant me. I—’

‘You, August Abelard, are going to die. You will speak no more. I find your pleading offensive as I do your position. You will be silent and you will rise. *Now.*’

The kneeling man opened his mouth to protest, but found he could not. No speech came from his lips, no words formed in his throat. Those red eyes—burning into his—they would not *let* him ...

He stood obediently.

‘Thank you. And now, I thirst....’

As the eyes and the red-stained fangs beneath them came closer, ever closer, August Abelard wanted to scream, but could not. Yet that did not stop him from trying.

Dawn had not yet made its presence felt in the streets and buildings of West Side Manhattan when Detective Lieutenant Hank Navarre poured himself a third cup of coffee and slumped in the chair behind his desk. The coffee tasted terrible, but so had the two which, during the past half-hour, had preceded it. Even so, the big policeman welcomed the bitter taste in his mouth, the feel of the hot fluid burning its way down his throat and into his gullet. Whatever else the coffee might be, it was a reality, something he could be sure about. And on this cold morning behind his desk there were other things he could not be sure about.

It had been slightly after midnight when he awoke in his car on Long Island’s Sunset Highway. Awoke? How could that be? He could not have been asleep, not really. The speedometer read forty-five. But not for long. He had pulled over to the side of the road and tried to collect his thoughts.

What had happened to him? His last recollection was that he planned to make an unauthorized tour of the Harmon place in Westhampton, but that was hours earlier. And from the landmarks about him, he was now quite a distance to the west of that community, and heading further west toward Manhattan. He seemed to recall...

But it wouldn’t come. His mind held absolutely no memory between the time he was in his car going east toward Westhampton and now. But he had been traveling the Long Island Expressway and now...

No. Still nothing came. He had started the car again. Maybe if he relaxed, if he put his mind just on driving, he might recall something—anything—some fragment of memory.

But he didn’t. There was only a feeling, a nagging sort of feeling in the very back of his brain. It was nothing specific, but its presence made him feel ill at ease. It was a cold night, but Hank Navarre’s palms were sweating.

By the time he reached Manhattan, the action was all over. The bat horde

had attacked Gracie Mansion and was now destroyed. At the precinct house there were odd stories being passed about the event. The way, for example, the winged killers seemed to offer themselves up as some kind of sacrifice. The way their owner had stumbled onto the scene with his note, the note that said that Professor Harmon was dead. But the professor was not dead, that had been confirmed shortly before the bats arrived at the mayor's residence.

And then there was the matter of the blood of the bat master—or, rather, its absence. According to the men who had seen him, his body had been almost completely drained. 'That ought to teach anybody not to fool around with vampires,' one of the sergeants had told Navarre. He was referring to the bats, the official theory being that the killers had finally turned against their master. After all, he was in fact killed by one of them, and his body bore the marks of an earlier attack.

But there were some disturbing things—disturbing to Navarre. Nobody else seemed bothered about them; everybody was glad to have the whole affair concluded. But...

The old Inan's words, though insane, were bothersome. He spoke of a man in black who *intervened*. Then, when pleading with the police not to kill his creatures, he said, '*He's brought them here to die.*' And of his own death, he said, *I know what he has in mind for me.*'

He.

The explanation offered by Sanford Proctor was that the crazed man no doubt was speaking of his brother, the twin who even now was surrounded in the cave-dwelling of the bats. Sanford Proctor being who he was, his explanation would be accepted, but somehow it didn't wash. Why would the man have referred to his brother as the *man in black*?

Something else. Navarre had a dim recollection—no, it wasn't even that strong—a feeling. Something to do with a man in black. A huge man with burning eyes....

Hurriedly Navarre brought the coffee cup to his lips and swallowed a huge portion of the scalding liquid.

At least there was one good thing: he already had been complimented on his foresight in assigning his two men to shadow Sanchez. Had he not done so, the second brother might have gotten away. As it was, they were waiting for daylight. Then they would go into the caves after him, making sure he couldn't escape. Then they would have the complete story.

Maybe. Somehow Navarre doubted it. Sanchez and Harmon ...

He opened a desk drawer and brought out a slim manila folder. The clipping was at the top of the pile:

ANTHONY MOB LIEUTENANT CLAIMS BOSS SPOKE OF VAMPIRES ON NIGHT OF DEATH

Vampires. The man in black ... with red eyes of white centers, piercing into his own, telling him—

He closed the file and replaced it in the drawer. Not now. He couldn't let his mind dwell on those things now. Maybe in a day or two, maybe a week, but not now. His mind was too tired.

And something more. That little nagging feeling. It seemed to have something to do with those red eyes staring at him, commanding....

And, below those eyes, smiling lips pulled back over teeth which were—

He shook off the chilled feeling which suddenly, but only for a moment, took over his body and mind. Again he took a great swallow from the coffee cup.

It was terrible, it was bitter. But it was real.

Notes

[←1]

Dracula Returns!

[←3]

The Hand of Dracula,